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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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In the summer of 1951, EQMM conducted a poll among authors, critics, and editors to determine the ten best active detective-story writers. The results were announced in September 1951, in connection with the celebration of EQMM's Tenth Anniversary.

One of the famous authors who nominated, in his personal opinion, the best living detective-story writers, was W. R. Burnett, whose LITTLE CAESAR *was both a landmark and a turning-point in the development of modern crime fiction. In giving his selections, Mr. Burnett commented on the vote he cast for Georges Simenon, and Mr. Burnett's remarks were so interesting and so impressive that we asked permission to quote from them.*

"To me," wrote Mr. Burnett, "Simenon is not only the best writer of detective stories living, he is also one of the finest novelists. There are plenty of novelists with large reputations who are not even in the same class with Simenon. Reviewers are prejudiced against him because of his subject matter. As I don't need to tell you, literary bias and literary snobbery have built many false reputations. Simenon's later work . . . deals almost exclusively with crime and is unsurpassed. To be quite frank, I often sweat blood when I read him, wondering how on earth he gets such wonderful results with such apparent ease and economy of means. If he isn't a first-class novelist then I know nothing whatever about writing and should go back to the farm."

Now we bring you a brand-new Simenon novelette, never before published in America, and surely one of Simenon's finest efforts in the field in which he is a master — the story of a Parisian manhunt, told with deep-rooted realism, with scrupulous attention to detail, with intimate knowledge of the people, the places, and the mechanics of pursuit — and above all, with the compassion and the understanding which are the hallmarks of Simenon's literary (and it is literary) work.

A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

by GEORGES SIMENON

(translated by Geoffrey Sainsbury)

AT HOME WE ALWAYS USED TO GO to Midnight Mass. I can't remember a Christmas when we missed it, though it meant a good half-hour's drive from the farm to the village. . . ."

The speaker, Sommer, was making some coffee on a little electric stove.

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"There were five of us," he went on. "Five boys, that is. . . . The winters were colder in those days. Sometimes we had to go by sledge. . . ."

Lecœur, on the switchboard, had taken off his earphones to listen.

"In what part of the country was that?"

"Lorraine."

"The winters in Lorraine were no colder thirty or forty years ago than they are now, only, of course, in those days the peasants had no cars. How many times did you go to Midnight Mass by sledge?"

"Couldn't say, exactly . . ."

"Three times? Twice? Perhaps no more than once. Only, it made a great impression on you, as you were a child."

"Anyhow, when we got back, we'd all have black-pudding, and I'm not exaggerating when I tell you I've never had anything like it since. I don't know what my mother used to put in them, but her *boudins* were quite different from anyone else's. My wife's tried, but it wasn't the same thing, though she had the exact recipe from my eldest sister — at least, my sister swore it was. . . ."

He walked over to one of the huge, uncurtained windows, through which was nothing but blackness, and scratched the pane with a fingernail.

"Hallo! There's frost forming. That again reminds me of when I was little. The water used to freeze in our rooms and we'd have to break the ice in the morning when we wanted to wash. . . ."

"People didn't have central heating in those days," answered Lecœur coolly.

There were three of them on night duty. *Les nuiteux*, they were called. They had been in that vast room since eleven o'clock, and now, at six on that Christmas morning, all three were looking a bit jaded. Three or four empty bottles were lying about, with the remains of the sandwiches they had brought with them.

A lamp no bigger than an aspirin tablet lit up on one of the walls. Its position told Lecœur at once where the call came from.

"13th *arrondissement*, Croulebarbe," he murmured, replacing his earphones.

He seized a plug and pushed it into a hole.

"Croulebarbe? . . . Your car's been called out — what for?"

"A call from the Boulevard Masséna. . . . Two drunks fighting."

Lecœur carefully made a little cross in one of the columns of his notebook.

"How are you getting on down your way?"

"There are only four of us here. Two are playing dominoes. . . ."

"Had any *boudin* tonight?"

"No. Why?"

"Never mind. I must ring off now. . . . There's a call from the 16th."

A gigantic map of Paris was drawn on the wall in front of him, and on it each police station was represented by a little lamp. As soon as anything happened anywhere, a lamp would light up and Lecœur would plug in to the appropriate socket.

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"Chaillot? . . . Hallo! . . . Your car's out? . . ."

In front of each police station throughout the twenty *arrondissements* of Paris one or more cars stood waiting, ready to dash off the moment an alarm was raised.

"What with?"

"Veronal."

That would be a woman. It was the third suicide that night, the second in the smart district of Passy.

Another little cross was entered in the appropriate column of Lecœur's notebook. Mambret, the third member of the watch, was sitting at a desk filling up forms.

"Hallo! Odéon? What's going on? . . . Oh, a car stolen. . . ."

That was for Mambret, who took down the particulars, then 'phoned them through to Piedbœuf in the room above. Piedbœuf, the teleprinter operator, had such a resounding voice that the others could hear it through the ceiling. This was the forty-eighth car whose details he had circulated that night.

An ordinary night, in fact — for them. Not so for the world outside. For this was the great night, *la nuit de Noël*. Not only was there the Midnight Mass, but all the theatres and cinemas were crammed, and at the big stores, which stayed open till twelve, a crowd of people jostled each other in a last-minute scramble to finish off their Christmas shopping.

Indoors were family gatherings feasting on roast turkey and perhaps also on *boudins* made, like the ones Sommer had been talking about, from a secret recipe handed down from mother to daughter.

There were children sleeping restlessly while their parents crept about, playing the part of Santa Claus, arranging the presents they would find on waking.

At the restaurants and cabarets every table had been booked at least a week in advance. In the Salvation Army barge on the Seine tramps and paupers queued up for an extra special.

Sommer had a wife and five children. Piedbœuf, the teleprinter operator upstairs, was a father of one week's standing.

Without the frost on the windowpanes they wouldn't have known it was freezing outside. In that vast, dingy room they were in a world apart, surrounded on all sides by the empty offices of the *Préfecture de Police*, which stood facing the *Palais de Justice*. It wasn't till the following day that those offices would once again be teeming with people in search of passport visas, driving licenses, and permits of every description.

In the courtyard below, cars stood waiting for emergency calls, the men of the flying squad dozing on the seats.

Nothing, however, had happened that night of sufficient importance to justify their being called out. You could see that from the little crosses in Lecœur's notebook. He didn't bother to count them, but he

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could tell at a glance that there were something like 200 in the drunks' column.

No doubt there'd have been a lot more if it hadn't been that this was a night for indulgence. In most cases the police were able to persuade those who had had too much to go home and keep out of trouble. Those arrested were the ones in whom drink raised the devil, those who smashed windows or molested other people.

Two hundred of that sort — a handful of women among them — were now out of harm's way, sleeping heavily on the wooden benches in the lock-ups.

There'd been five knifings. Two near the Porte d'Italie. Three in the remoter part of Montmartre, not in the Montmartre of the Moulin Rouge and the Lapin Agile, but in the Zone, beyond where the *Fortifs* used to be, whose population included over 100,000 Arabs, living in huts made of old packing-cases and roofing-felt.

A few children lost in the exodus from the churches. But they were soon returned to their anxious parents.

"Hallo! Chaillot? How's your veronal case getting on?"

She wasn't dead. Of course not! Few went as far as that. Suicide is all very well as a gesture. Indeed, it can be a very effective one. But there's no need to go and kill yourself!

"Talking of *boudin*," said Mambret, who was smoking an enormous meerschaum pipe, "that reminds me of . . ."

They were never to know what he was reminded of. There were steps in the corridor, then the handle of the door was turned. All three looked round at once, wondering who could be coming to see them at ten past six, in the morning.

"*Salut!*" said the man who entered, throwing his hat down on a chair.

"Whatever brings you here, Janvier?"

It was a detective of the *Brigade des Homicides*, who walked straight over to the stove to warm his hands.

"I got pretty bored sitting all by myself, and I thought I might as well come over here. After all, if the killer's going to do his stuff, I'd hear about it quicker here than anywhere."

He, too, had been on duty all night, but round the corner, in the *Police Judiciaire*.

"You don't mind, do you?" he asked, picking up the coffee-pot. "There's a bitter wind blowing."

It had made his ears red.

"I don't suppose we shall hear till eight, probably later," said Lecœur.

For the last fifteen years he had spent his nights in that room, sitting at the switchboard, keeping an eye on the big map with the little lamps. He knew half the police in Paris by name, or, at any rate, those who did night duty. Of many he knew even their private affairs, as, when things were quiet, he would have long chats with them over the telephone to pass the time away.

"Oh, it's you, Dumas. . . . How are things at home?"

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But though there were many whose voices were familiar, there were hardly any of them he knew by sight.

Nor was his acquaintance confined to the police. He was on equally familiar terms with many of the hospitals.

"Hallo! . . . Bichat? . . . What about the chap who was brought in half an hour ago? . . . Is he dead yet? . . ."

He was dead, and another little cross went into the notebook. The latter was, in its unpretentious way, quite a mine of information. If you asked Lecœur how many murders in the last twelve months had been done for the sake of money, he'd give the answer in a moment — sixty-seven.

"How many murders committed by foreigners?"

"Forty-two."

You could go on like that for hours without being able to trip him up. And yet he trotted out his figures without a trace of swank. It was his hobby: that was all.

For he wasn't obliged to make those crosses. It was his own idea. Like the chats over the telephone lines, they helped to pass the time away, and the result gave him much the same satisfaction that others derive from a collection of stamps.

He was unmarried. Few knew where he lived or what sort of a life he led outside that room. It was difficult to picture him anywhere else, even to think of him walking along the street like an ordinary person. He turned to Janvier to say:

"For your cases, we generally have to wait till people are up and about. It's when a *concierge* goes up with the post or when a maid takes her mistress' breakfast in to the bedroom that things like that come to light."

He claimed no special merit in knowing a thing like that. It was just a fact. A bit earlier in summer, of course, and later in winter. On Christmas Day probably later still, as a considerable part of the population hadn't got to bed till two or even later, to say nothing of their having to sleep off a good many glasses of champagne.

Before then still more water would have gone under the bridge, a few more stolen cars, a few belated drunks, a few . . .

"Hallo! . . . Saint-Gervais? . . ."

His Paris was not the one known to the rest of us — the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre, the Opera — but one of sombre, massive buildings, with a police-car waiting under the blue lamp and the bicycles of the *agents cyclistes* leaning against the wall.

"The Chief is convinced the chap'll have another go tonight," said Janvier. "It's just the night for people of that sort. Seems to excite them."

No name was mentioned, for none was known. Nor could he be described as the man in the fawn raincoat or the man in the gray hat, since no one had ever seen him. For a while the papers had referred to him as Monsieur Dimanche, as his first three murders had been on Sunday, but since then five others had been on

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week-days, at the rate of about one a week, though not quite regularly.

"It's because of him you've been on all night, is it?" asked Mambret.

Janvier wasn't the only one. All over Paris extra men were on duty, watching or waiting.

"You'll see," put in Sommer, "when you do get him you'll find he's only a loony."

"Loony or no, he's killed eight people," sighed Janvier, sipping his coffee. "Look, Lecœur! There's one of your lamps burning."

"Hallo! . . . Your cat's out? . . . What's that? . . . Just a moment. . . ."

They could see Lecœur hesitate, not knowing in which column to put a cross. There was one for hangings, one for those who jumped out of the window, another for . . .

"Here, listen to this. . . . On the Pont d'Austerlitz a chap climbed up on to the parapet. He had his legs tied together and a cord round his neck with the end made fast to a lamp-post, and, as he threw himself over, he fired a shot into his head!"

"Taking no risks, what. . . . And which column does that one go into?"

"There's one for neurasthenics. We may as well call it that!"

Those who hadn't been to Midnight Mass were now on their way to early service. With hands thrust deep in their pockets and drops on the ends of their noses, they walked bent forward into the cutting wind, which seemed to blow up a fine, icy dust from the pavements. It would soon be time for the children to be waking up, jumping out of bed, and gathering barefoot round lighted Christmas trees.

"But it's not at all sure the fellow's mad. In fact, the experts say that if he was, he'd always do it the same way. If it was a knife, then it would always be a knife."

"What did he use last time?"

"A hammer."

"And the time before?"

"A dagger."

"What makes you think it's the same chap?"

"First of all, the fact that there've been eight murders in quick succession. You don't get eight new murderers cropping up in Paris all at once."

Belonging to the *Police Judiciaire*, Janvier had, of course, heard the subject discussed at length.

"Besides, there's a sort of family likeness between them all. The victims are invariably solitary people, people who live alone, without any family or friends."

Sommer looked at Lecœur, whom he could never forgive for not being a family man. Not only had he five children himself, but a sixth was already on the way.

"You'd better look out, Lecœur! You see the kind of thing it leads to!"

"Then, not one of the crimes has been committed in one of the wealthier districts? . . ."

"Yet he steals, doesn't he?"

"He does, but not much. The little hoards hidden under the mattress —

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that's his mark. He doesn't break in. In fact, apart from the murder and the money missing, he leaves no trace at all."

Another lamp burning. A stolen car found abandoned in a little side street, near the Place des Ternes.

"All the same, I can't help laughing over the people who had to walk home. . . ."

Another hour or more and they would be relieved, except Lecœur, who had promised to do the first day shift as well, so that his opposite number could join in a family Christmas party somewhere near Rouen.

It was a thing he often did, so much so that he had come to be regarded as an ever-ready substitute for anybody who wanted a day off.

"I say, Lecœur. . . . Do you think you could look out for me on Friday?"

At first the request was proffered with a suitable excuse, a sick mother, a funeral, or a first communion, and he was generally rewarded with a bottle of wine. But now it was taken for granted and treated quite casually.

To tell the truth, had it been possible, Lecœur would have been only too glad to spend his whole life in that room, snatching a few hours' sleep on a camp bed and picnicking as best he could with the aid of the little electric stove. It was a funny thing: although he was as careful as any of the others about his personal appearance, and much more so than Sommer, who always looked a bit tousled, yet there was something a bit drab about him which betrayed the bachelor.

He wore strong glasses which gave him big, globular eyes, and it came as a surprise to everyone, when he took them off to wipe them with the bit of chamois leather he always carried about, to see the transformation. Without them, his eyes were gentle, rather shy, and inclined to look away quickly when anyone looked his way.

"Hallo! Javel? . . ."

Another lamp. One near the Quai de Javel in the 15th *arrondissement*, a district full of factories.

"*Votre car est sorti?*"

"We don't know yet what it is. Someone's broken the glass of the alarm in the Rue Leblanc."

"Wasn't there a message?"

"No. We've sent our car to investigate. I'll ring you again later."

Scattered here and there all over Paris are red-painted telephone pillars standing by the curb, and you have only to break the glass to be in direct telephone communication with the nearest police-station. Had a passer-by broken the glass accidentally? It looked like it, for a couple of minutes later Javel rang up again.

"Hallo! Central? . . . Our car's just got back. Nobody about. The whole district seems quiet as the grave. All the same, we've sent out a patrol."

How was Lecœur to classify that one? Unwilling to admit defeat, he put a little cross in the column on the extreme right headed "Miscellaneous."

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"Is there any coffee left?" he asked.

"I'll make some more."

The same lamp lit up again, barely ten minutes after the first call.

"Javel? . . . What's it this time?"

"Same again. Another glass broken."

"Nothing said?"

"Not a word. Must be some practical joker. Thinks it funny to keep us on the hop. When we catch him he'll find out whether it's funny or not!"

"Which one was it?"

"The one on the Pont Mirabeau."

"Seems to walk pretty quickly, your practical joker!"

There was indeed quite a good stretch between the two pillars.

So far, nobody was taking it very seriously. False alarms were not uncommon. Some people took advantage of these handy instruments to express their feelings about the police.

"*Mort aux flics!*" was the favorite phrase.

With his feet on a radiator, Janvier was just dozing off, when he heard Lecœur telephoning again. He half-opened his eyes, saw which lamp was on, and muttered sleepily:

"There he is again!"

He was right. A glass broken at the top of the Avenue de Versailles.

"Silly ass!" he grunted, settling down again.

It wouldn't be really light until half-past seven or even eight. Sometimes they could hear a vague sound of church bells, but that was in another world. The wretched men of the flying squad waiting in the cars below must be half-frozen.

"Talking of *boudin* . . ."

"What *boudin?*" murmured Janvier, whose cheeks were flushed with sleep.

"The one my mother used to . . ."

"Hallo! What? . . . You're not going to tell me someone's smashed the glass of one of your telephone pillars? . . . Really? . . . It must be the same chap. . . . We've already had two reported from the 15th. . . . Yes, they tried to nab him, but couldn't find a soul about. . . . Gets about pretty fast, doesn't he? . . . He crossed the river by the Pont Mirabeau. . . . Seems to be heading in this direction. . . . Yes. You may as well have a try. . . ."

Another little cross. By half-past seven, with only half an hour of the night watch to go, there were five crosses in the *Miscellaneous* column.

Mad or sane, the person was a good walker. Perhaps the cold wind had something to do with it. It wasn't the weather for sauntering along.

For a time it had looked as though he was keeping to the right bank of the Seine, then he had sheered off into the wealthy Auteuil district, breaking a glass in the Rue La Fontaine.

"He's only five minutes' walk from the Bois de Boulogne," Lecœur had said. "If he once gets there, they'll never pick him up."

But the fellow had turned round and made for the quays again, breaking a glass in the Rue Berton, just

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round the corner from the Quai de Passy.

The first calls had come from the poorer quarters of Grenelle, but the man had only to cross the river to find himself in entirely different surroundings — quiet, spacious, and deserted streets, where his footfalls must have rung out clearly on the frosty pavements.

Sixth call. Skirting the Place du Trocadéro, he was in the Rue de Longchamp.

"The chap seems to think he's on a paper-chase," remarked Mambret. "Only he uses broken glass instead of paper."

Other calls came in in quick succession. Another stolen car, a revolver-shot in the Rue de Flandres, whose victim swore he didn't know who fired it, though he'd been seen all through the night drinking in company with another man.

"Hallo! Here's Javel again. . . . Hallo! Javel? It can't be your practical joker this time: he must be somewhere near the Champs Elysées by now. . . . Oh, yes. He's still at it. . . . Well, what's your trouble? . . . What? . . . Spell it, will you? . . . Rue Michat. Yes, I've got it. Between the Rue Lecourbe and the Boulevard Félix Faure. . . . By the viaduct — yes, I know. . . . No. 17. . . . Who reported it? . . . The *concierge*? . . . She's just been up, I suppose. . . . Oh, shut up, will you! . . . No, I wasn't speaking to you. It's Sommer here, who can't stop talking about a *boudin* he ate thirty years ago! . . ."

Sommer broke off and listened to the man on the switchboard.

"What were you saying? . . . A shabby, seven-story block of flats. . . . Yes. . . ."

There were plenty of buildings like that in the district, buildings that weren't really old, but of such poor construction that they were already dilapidated. Buildings that as often as not thrust themselves up bleakly in the middle of a bit of wasteland, towering over the little shacks and hovels around them, their blind walls plastered with advertisements.

"You say she heard someone running downstairs and then a door slam. . . . The door of the house, I suppose. . . . On which floor is the flat? . . . The *entresol*. . . . Which way does it face? . . . Onto an inner courtyard. . . . Just a moment. There's a call coming in from the 8th. That must be our friend of the telephone pillars. . . ."

Lecœur asked the new caller to wait, then came back to Javel.

"An old woman, you say. . . . Madame Fayet. . . . Worked as charwoman. . . . Dead? . . . A blunt instrument. . . . Is the doctor there? . . . You're sure she's dead? . . . What about her money? I suppose she had some tucked away somewhere. . . . Right. Call me back. . . . Or I'll ring you. . . ."

He turned to the detective, who was now sleeping soundly.

"Janvier! Hey! Janvier! . . . This is for you."

"What? What is it?"

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"The killer."

"Where?"

"Near the Rue Lecourbe. Here's the address. . . . This time he's done in an old charwoman, a Madame Fayet."

Janvier put on his overcoat, looked round for his hat, and gulped down the remains of the coffee in his cup.

"Who's dealing with it?"

"Gonesse, of the 15th."

"Ring up the *P. J.*, will you, and tell them I've gone there. . . ."

A minute or two later, Lecœur was able to add another little cross to the six that were already in the column. Someone had smashed the glass of the pillar in the Avenue d'Iéna only one hundred and fifty yards from the Arc de Triomphe.

"Among the broken glass they found a handkerchief flecked with blood. It was a child's handkerchief."

"Has it got initials?"

"No. It's a blue-check handkerchief, rather dirty. The chap must have wrapped it round his knuckles for breaking the glass."

There were steps in the corridor. The day shift coming to take over. They looked very clean and close-shaven and the cold wind had whipped the blood into their cheeks.

"Happy Christmas!"

Sommer closed the tin in which he brought his sandwiches. Mambret knocked out his pipe. Only Lecœur remained in his seat, since there was no relief for him.

The fat Godin had been the first to arrive, promptly changing his jacket for the gray linen coat in which he always worked, then putting some water on to boil for his grog. All through the winter he suffered from one never-ending cold which he combated, or perhaps nourished, by one hot grog after another.

"Hallo! Yes, I'm still here. I'm doing a shift for Potier who's gone down to his family in Normandy. . . . Yes. I want to hear all about it. . . . Most particularly. . . . Janvier's gone, but I'll pass it on to the *P.J.* An invalid, you say? . . . What invalid?"

One had to be patient on that job, as people always talked about their cases as though everyone else was in the picture.

"A low building behind, right. . . . Not in the Rue Michat, then? . . . Rue Vasco de Gama. . . . Yes, yes. I know. The little house with a garden behind some railings. . . . Only I didn't know he was an invalid. . . . Right. . . . He doesn't sleep much. . . . Saw a young boy climbing up a drain-pipe? . . . How old? . . . He couldn't say? . . . Of course not, in the dark. . . . How did he know it was a boy, then? . . . Listen, ring me up again, will you? . . . Oh, you're going off. . . . Who's relieving you? . . . Jules? . . . Right. Well, ask him to keep me informed. . . ."

"What's going on?" asked Godin.

"An old woman who's been done in. Down by the Rue Lecourbe."

"Who did it?"

"There's an invalid opposite who

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says he saw a small boy climbing up a drain-pipe and along the top of a wall."

"You mean to say it was a boy who killed the old woman?"

"We don't know yet. . . ."

No one was very interested. After all, murders were an everyday matter to these people. The lights were still on in the room, as it was still only a bleak, dull daylight that found its way through the frosty window-panes. One of the new watch went and scratched a bit of the frost away. It was instinctive. A childish memory perhaps, like Sommer's *boudin*.

The latter had gone home. So had Mambret. The newcomers settled down to their work, turning over the papers on their desks.

A car stolen from the Square la Bruyère.

Lecœur looked pensively at his seven crosses. Then, with a sigh, he got up and stood gazing at the immense street plan on the wall.

"Brushing up on your Paris?"

"I think I know it pretty well already. Something's just struck me. There's a chap wandering about smashing the glass of telephone pillars. Seven in the last hour and a half. He hasn't been going in a straight line, but zigzagging first this way, then that. . . ."

"Perhaps he doesn't know Paris."

"Or knows it only too well! Not once has he ventured within sight of a police-station. If he'd gone straight, he'd have passed two or three. What's more, he's skirted all the main cross-roads, where there'd be likely to be a man on duty."

Lecœur pointed them out.

"The only risk he took was in crossing the Pont Mirabeau, but if he wanted to cross the river he'd have run that risk at any of the bridges."

"I expect he's drunk," said Godin, sipping his rum.

"What I want to know is why he's stopped."

"Perhaps he's got home."

"A man who's down by the Quai de Javel at half-past six in the morning isn't likely to live near the Etoile."

"Seems to interest you a lot!"

"It's got me scared!"

"Go on!"

It was strange to see the worried expression on Lecœur's face. He was notorious for his calmness and his most dramatic nights were coolly summarized by the little crosses in his notebook.

"Hallo! Javel? . . . Is that Jules? . . . Lecœur speaking. . . . Look here, Jules. Behind the flats in the Rue Michat is the little house where the invalid lives. . . . Well, now, on one side of it is an apartment house, a red brick building with a grocer's shop on the ground floor. You know it? Good. . . . Has anything happened there? . . . Nothing reported. . . . No, we've heard nothing here. . . . All the same . . . I can't explain why, but I think you ought to inquire. . . ."

He was hot all at once. He stubbed out a half-finished cigarette.

"Hallo! Ternes? . . . Any alarms

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gone off in your neighborhood? Nothing? Only drunks? . . . Is the *patrouille cycliste* out? . . . Just leaving? . . . Ask them to keep their eyes open for a young boy looking tired and very likely bleeding from the right hand. . . . Lost? . . . Not exactly that. . . . I can't explain now. . . ."

His eyes went back to the street plan on the wall, in which no light went on for a good ten minutes, and then only for an accidental death in the 18th *arrondissement*, right up at the top of Montmartre, caused by an escape of gas.

Outside, in the cold streets of Paris, dark figures were hurrying home from the churches.

One of the sharpest impressions that André Lecœur retained of his infancy was one of immobility. His world at that period was a large kitchen in Orléans, on the outskirts of the town. He must have spent his winters there too, but he remembered it best flooded with sunlight, with the door wide open onto a little garden where hens clucked incessantly and rabbits nibbled lettuce leaves behind the wire netting of their hutches. But, if the door was open, its passage was barred to him by a little gate which his father had made one Sunday for that express purpose.

On week-days, at half-past eight, his father went off on his bicycle to the gasworks at the other end of the town. His mother did the housework, doing just the same things in the same order every day. Before making the beds, she put the bedclothes over the window-sill for an hour to air.

At ten o'clock a little bell would ring in the street. That was the greengrocer, with his barrow, passing on his daily round. Twice a week at eleven a bearded doctor came to see his little brother, who was constantly ill. André hardly ever saw the latter, as he wasn't allowed into his room.

That was all, or so it seemed in retrospect. He had just time to play a bit and drink his milk, and there was his father home again for the mid-day meal.

If nothing had happened at home, lots had happened to him. He had been to read the meters in any number of houses and chatted with all sorts of people, about whom he would talk during dinner.

As for the afternoon, it slipped away quicker still, perhaps because he was made to sleep during the first part of it.

For his mother, apparently, the time passed just as quickly. Often had he heard her say with a sigh:

"There! I've no sooner washed up after one meal than it's time to start making another!"

Perhaps it wasn't so very different now. Here in the Préfecture de Police the nights seemed long enough at the time, but at the end they seemed to have slipped by in no time, with nothing to show for them except for these columns of the little crosses in his notebook.

A few more lamps lit up. A few

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more incidents reported, including a collision between a car and a bus in the Rue de Clignancourt, and then once again it was Javel on the line.

It wasn't Jules, however, but Gonesse, the detective who'd been to the scene of the crime. While there, he had received Lecœur's message suggesting something might have happened in the other house in the Rue Vasco de Gama. He had been to see.

"Is that you, Lecœur?"

There was a queer note in his voice. Either irritation or suspicion.

"Look here. . . . What made you think of that house. Do you know the old woman, Madame Fayet?"

"I've never seen her, but I know all about her."

What had finally come to pass that Christmas morning was something that André Lecœur had foreseen and perhaps dreaded for more than ten years. Again and again, as he stared at the huge plan of Paris, with its little lamps, he had said to himself:

"It's only a question of time. Sooner or later, it'll be something that's happened to someone I know."

There'd been many a near miss, an accident in his own street or a crime in a house nearby. But, like thunder, it had approached only to recede once again into the distance.

This time it was a direct hit.

"Have you seen the *concierge*?" he asked. He could imagine the puzzled look on the detective's face as he went on: "Is the boy at home?"

And Gonesse muttered: "Oh? So you know him, too?"

"He's my nephew. Weren't you told his name was Lecœur?"

"Yes, but . . ."

"Never mind about that. Tell me what's happened."

"The boy's not there."

"What about his father?"

"He got home just after seven."

"As usual. He does night work, too."

"The *concierge* heard him go up to his flat — on the third floor at the back of the house."

"I know it."

"He came running down a minute or two later, in a great state. To use her expression, he seemed out of his wits."

"The boy had disappeared?"

"Yes. His father wanted to know if she'd seen him leave the house. She hadn't. Then he asked if a telegram had been delivered."

"Was there a telegram?"

"No. Can you make head or tail of it? . . . Since you're one of the family you might be able to help us. Could you get someone to relieve you and come round here?"

"It wouldn't do any good. Where's Janvier?"

"In the old woman's room. The men of the *Identité Judiciaire* have already got to work. The first thing they found were some child's fingerprints on the handle of the door. Come on! Jump into a taxi and come round. . . ."

"No. In any case there's no one to take my place."

That was true enough up to a

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point. All the same, if he'd really got to work on the telephone he'd have found someone all right. The truth was he didn't want to go and didn't think it would do any good if he did.

"Listen, Gonesse. . . . I've got to find that boy, and I can do it better from here than anywhere. You understand, don't you? . . . Tell Janvier I'm staying here. And tell him old Madame Fayet had plenty of money, probably hidden away somewhere in the room."

A little feverishly he stuck his plug into one socket after another, calling up the various police stations of the 8th *arrondissement*.

"Keep a look-out for a boy of ten, rather poorly dressed. . . . Keep all telephone pillars under observation."

His two fellow-watchkeepers looked at him with curiosity.

"Do you think it was the boy who did the job?"

Lecœur didn't bother to answer. The next moment he was through to the teleprinter room, where they also dealt with radio messages.

"Justin? . . . Oh, you're on, are you? . . . Here's something special. . . . Will you send out a call to all cars on patrol anywhere near the Etoile to keep a look-out for . . ."

Once again the description of the boy, François Lecœur.

"No. I've no idea in which direction he'll be making. All I can tell you is that he seems to keep well clear of police stations, and as far as possible from any place where there's likely to be anyone on traffic duty."

He knew his brother's flat in the Rue Vasco de Gama. Two rather dark rooms and a tiny kitchen. The boy slept there alone, while his father was at work. From the windows you could see the back of the house in the Rue Michat, across a courtyard generally hung with washing. On some of the window-sills were pots of geraniums, and through the windows, many of which were uncurtained, you could catch glimpses of a miscellaneous assortment of humanity.

As a matter of fact, there, too, the window-panes ought to be covered with frost. He stored that idea up in a corner of his mind. It might be important.

"You think it's a boy who's been smashing the alarm glasses?"

"It was a child's handkerchief they found," said Lecœur curtly.

He didn't want to be drawn into a discussion. He sat mutely at the switchboard, wondering what to do next.

In the Rue Michat things seemed to be moving fast. The next time he got through it was to learn that a doctor was there as well as an examining magistrate, who had most likely been dragged from his bed.

What help could Lecœur have given them? But if he wasn't there, he could see the place almost as clearly as those that were, the dismal houses and the grimy viaduct of the Métro which cut right across the landscape.

Nothing but poor people in that neighborhood. The younger genera-

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tion's one hope was to escape from it. The middle-aged already doubted whether they ever would, while the old ones had already accepted their fate and tried to make the best of it.

He rang Javel once again.

"Is Gonesse still there?"

"He's writing up his report. Shall I call him?"

"Yes, please. . . . Hallo, Gonesse! . . . Lecœur speaking. . . . Sorry to bother you, but did you go up to my brother's flat? . . . Had the boy's bed been slept in? . . . It had? Good. That makes it look a bit better. . . . Another thing: were there any parcels there? . . . Yes, parcels, Christmas presents. . . . What? . . . A small square radio. . . . Hadn't been unpacked. . . . Naturally. . . . Anything else? Things to eat? . . . What were they? . . . A chicken, a *boudin*, a Saint-Honoré. . . . I suppose Janvier's not with you? . . . Still on the spot. Right. . . . Has he rung up the *P.J.*? . . . Good. . . ."

He was surprised to see it was already half-past nine. It was no use now expecting anything from the neighborhood of the Etoile. If the boy had gone on walking as he had been earlier, he could be pretty well anywhere by this time.

"Hallo! . . . *Police Judiciaire?* . . . Is Inspector Saillard there?"

He was another whom the murder had dragged from his fireside. How many people were there whose Christmas was going to be spoiled by it?

"Excuse my troubling you, *Monsieur le Commissaire*. . . . It's about that young boy, François Lecœur."

"Do you know anything? Is he a relation of yours?"

"He's my brother's son. . . . And it looks as if he may well be the person who's been smashing the glasses of the telephone pillars. Seven of them. I don't know whether they've had time to tell you about that. . . . What I wanted to ask was whether I might put out a general call. . . ."

"Could you nip over to see me?"

"There's no one here to take my place."

"Right. I'll come over myself. Meanwhile you can send out the call."

Lecœur kept calm though his hand shook slightly as he plugged in once again to the room above.

"Justin? . . . Lecœur again. . . . *Appel Général*. Yes. It's the same boy. François Lecœur. Ten and a half. Rather tall for his age. Thin. I don't know what he's wearing, probably a khaki jumper made from American battle-dress. No. No cap. He's always bare-headed, with plenty of hair flopping over his forehead. . . . Perhaps it would be as well to send out a description of his father, too. That's not so easy. . . . You know me, don't you? Well, Olivier Lecœur is rather like a paler version of me. He has a timid look about him and physically he's not robust. The sort that's never in the middle of the pavement but always dodging out of other people's way. He walks a bit queerly, owing to a wound he got in the first war. . . . No, I haven't the least idea where they might be going,

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only I don't think they're together. To my mind, the boy is probably in danger. I can't explain why; it would take too long. . . . Get the descriptions out as quickly as possible, will you? And let me know if there's any response."

By the time Lecœur had finished telephoning, Inspector Saillard was there, having only had to come round the corner from the Quai des Orfèvres. He was an imposing figure of a man, particularly in his bulky overcoat. With a comprehensive wave of the hand he greeted the three men on watch, then, seizing a chair as though it were a wisp of straw, he swung it round towards him and sat down heavily.

"The boy?" he inquired at last, looking keenly at Lecœur.

"I can't understand why he's stopped calling us up."

"Calling us up?"

"Attracting our attention, anyway."

"But why should he attract our attention and then not say anything?"

"Supposing he was followed. Or was following someone."

"I see what you mean. . . . Look here, Lecœur, is your brother in financial straits?"

"He's a poor man, yes."

"Is that all?"

"He lost his job three months ago."

"What job?"

"He was linotype operator at *La Presse* in the Rue du Croissant. He was on the night shift. He always did night work. Runs in the family."

"How did he come to lose his job?"

"I suppose he fell out with somebody."

"Is that a failing of his?"

They were interrupted by an incoming call from the 18th to say that a boy selling branches of holly had been picked up in the Rue Lepic. It turned out, however, to be a little Pole who couldn't speak any French.

"You were asking if my brother was in the habit of quarreling with people. I hardly know what to answer. He was never strong. Pretty well all his childhood he was ill on and off. He hardly ever went to school. But he read a great deal all alone in his room."

"Is he married?"

"His wife died two years after they were married, leaving him with a baby ten months old."

"Did he bring it up himself?"

"Entirely. I can see him now bathing the little chap, changing his diapers, and warming the milk for his bottle. . . ."

"That doesn't explain why he quarrels with people."

Admittedly. But it was difficult to put it into words.

"Soured?"

"Not exactly. The thing is . . ."

"What?"

"That he's never lived like other people. Perhaps Olivier isn't really very intelligent. Perhaps, from reading so much, he knows too much about some things and too little about others."

"Do you think him capable of killing the old woman?"

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The Inspector puffed at his pipe. They could hear the people in the room above walking about. The two other men fiddled with their papers, pretending not to listen.

"She was his mother-in-law," sighed Lecœur. "You'd have found it out anyhow, sooner or later."

"They didn't hit it off?"

"She hated him."

"Why?"

"She considered him responsible for her daughter's death. It seems she could have been saved if the operation had been done in time. It wasn't my brother's fault. The people at the hospital refused to take her in. Some silly question of her papers not being in order. All the same, Madame Fayet held to it that Olivier was to blame."

"Did they see each other?"

"Not unless they passed each other in the street, and then they never spoke."

"Did the boy know?"

"That she was his grandmother? I don't think so."

"You think his father never told him?"

Never for more than a second or two did Lecœur's eyes leave the plan of Paris, but, besides being Christmas, it was the quiet time of the day, and the little lamps lit up rarely. Two or three street accidents, a lady's handbag snatched in the Métro, a suitcase pinched at the Gare de l'Est.

No sign of the boy. It was surprising considering how few people were about. In the poor quarters a few little children played on the pavements with their new toys, but on the whole the day was lived indoors. Nearly all the shops were shuttered and the cafés and the little bars were almost empty.

For a moment the town came to life a bit when the church bells started pealing and families in their Sunday best hurried to High Mass. But soon the streets were quiet again, though haunted here and there by the vague rumble of an organ or a sudden gust of singing.

The thought of churches gave Lecœur an idea. Might not the boy have tucked himself away in one of them? Would the police think of looking there? He spoke to Inspector Saillard about it and then got through to Justin for the third time.

"The churches. . . . Ask them to have a look at the congregations. . . . They'll be doing the stations, of course — that's most important. . . ."

He took off his glasses for a moment, showing eyelids that were red, probably from lack of sleep.

"Hallo! . . . Yes. The Inspector's here. Hold on."

He held the receiver to Saillard.

"It's Janvier."

The bitter wind was still driving through the streets. The light was harsh and bleak, though here and there among the closely packed clouds was a yellowy streak which could be taken as a faint promise of sunshine to come.

When the Inspector put down the receiver he muttered:

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"Dr. Paul says the crime was committed between five and half-past six this morning. The old woman wasn't killed by the first blow. Apparently she was in bed when she heard a noise and got up and faced the intruder. Indeed, it looks as though she tried to defend herself with the only weapon that came to hand — a shoe."

"Have they found the weapon she was killed with?"

"No. It might have been a hammer. More likely a bit of lead piping or something of that sort."

"Have they found her money?"

"Only her purse, with some small change in it and her identity card. Tell me, Lecœur, did you know she was a money-lender?"

"Yes. I knew."

"And didn't you tell me your brother's been out of work for three months?"

"He has."

"The *concierge* didn't know."

"Neither did the boy. It was for his sake he kept it dark."

The Inspector crossed and uncrossed his legs. He was uncomfortable. He glanced at the other two men who couldn't help hearing everything, then turned with a puzzled look to stare at Lecœur.

"Do you realize what all this is pointing to?"

"I do."

"You've thought of it yourself?"

"No."

"Because he's your brother?"

"No."

"How long is it that this killer's been at work? Nine weeks, isn't it?"

Without haste, Lecœur studied the columns of his notebook.

"Yes. Just over nine weeks. The first was on the 20th of October, in the Epinettes district."

"You say your brother didn't tell his son he was out of a job. . . . Do you mean to say he went on leaving home in the evening just as though he was going to work?"

"Yes. He couldn't face the idea of telling him. You see. . . . It's difficult to explain. He was completely wrapped up in the boy. He was all he had to live for. He cooked and scrubbed for him, tucked him up in bed before going off, and woke him up in the morning. . . ."

"That doesn't explain why he couldn't tell him."

"He couldn't bear the thought of appearing to the kid as a failure, a man nobody wanted and who had doors slammed in his face."

"But what did he do with himself all night?"

"Odd jobs. When he could get them. For a fortnight he was employed as night watchman in a factory in Billancourt, but that was only while the regular man was ill. Often he got a few hours' work washing down cars in one of the big garages. When that failed he'd sometimes lend a hand at the market, unloading vegetables. When he had one of his bouts. . . ."

"Bouts of what?"

"Asthma. . . . He had them from time to time. . . . Then he'd lie

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down in a station waiting-room. Once he spent a whole night here, chatting with me. . . ."

"Now, suppose the boy woke up early this morning and saw his father at Madame Fayet's."

"There was frost on the windows."

"There wouldn't be if the window was open. Lots of people sleep with their windows open, even in the coldest weather."

"It wasn't the case with my brother. He was always a chilly person. And he was much too poor to waste warmth."

"As far as his window was concerned, the boy had only to scratch away the frost with his fingernails. When I was a boy . . ."

"Yes. So did I. . . . The thing is to find out whether the old woman's window was open."

"It was, and the light was switched on."

"I wonder where François can have got to."

"The boy?"

It was surprising, and a little disconcerting, the way he kept all the time reverting to him. The situation was certainly embarrassing, and somehow made all the more so by the calm way in which André Lecœur gave the Inspector the most damaging details about his brother.

"When he came in this morning," began Saillard again, "he was carrying a number of parcels. You realize . . ."

"It's Christmas."

"Yes. But he'd have needed quite a bit of money to buy a chicken, a cake, and that new radio. Has he borrowed any from you lately?"

"Not for a month. I haven't seen him for a month. I wish I had. I'd have told him that I was getting a radio for François myself. I've got it here. Downstairs, that is, in the cloakroom. I was going to take it straight round as soon as I was relieved."

"Would Madame Fayet have consented to lend him money?"

"It's unlikely. She was a queer lot. She must have had quite enough money to live on, yet she still went out to work, charing from morning to evening. Often she lent money to the people she worked for. At exorbitant interest, of course. All the neighborhood knew about it, and people always came to her when they needed something to tide them over till the end of the month."

Still embarrassed, the Inspector rose to his feet.

"I'm going to have a look," he said.

"At Madame Fayet's?"

"There and in the Rue Vasco de Gama. If you get any news, let me know, will you?"

"You won't find any telephone there, but I can get a message to you through the Javel police-station."

The Inspector's footsteps had hardly died away before the telephone bell rang. No lamp had lit up on the wall. This was an outside call, coming from the Gare d'Austerlitz.

"Lecœur? Station police speaking. We've got him."

"Who?"

"The man whose description was

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circulated. Lecœur. Same as you. Olivier Lecœur. No doubt about it, I've seen his identity card."

"Hold on, will you?"

Lecœur dashed out of the room and down the stairs, just in time to catch the Inspector as he was getting into one of the cars belonging to the *Préfecture*.

"Inspector! . . . The Gare d'Austerlitz is on the 'phone. They've found my brother."

Saillard was a stout man and he went up the stairs puffing and blowing. He took the receiver himself.

"Hallo! . . . Yes. . . . Where was he? . . . What was he doing? . . . What? . . . No. There's no point in your questioning him now. . . . You're sure he didn't know? . . . Right. Go on looking out. . . . It's quite possible. . . . As for him, send him here straight away. . . . At the *Préfecture*, yes. . . ."

He hesitated for a second and glanced at Lecœur before saying finally:

"Yes. Send someone with him. We can't take any risks."

The Inspector filled his pipe and lit it before explaining, and when he spoke he looked at nobody in particular.

"He was picked up after he'd been wandering about the station for over an hour. He seemed very jumpy. Said he was waiting there to meet his son, from whom he'd received a message."

"Did they tell him about the murder?"

"Yes. He appeared to be staggered by the news and terrified. I asked them to bring him along." Rather diffidently he added: "I asked them to bring him here. Considering your relationship . . . I didn't want you to think . . ."

Lecœur had been in that room since eleven o'clock the night before. It was rather like his early years, when he spent his days in his mother's kitchen. Around him was an unchanging world. There were the little lamps, of course, that kept going on and off, but that's what they always did. They were part and parcel of the immutability of the place. Time flowed by without anyone noticing it.

Yet outside Paris was celebrating Christmas. Thousands of people had been to Midnight Mass, thousands more had spent the night roistering, and those who hadn't known where to draw the line had sobered down in the *dépôt* and were now being called upon to explain things they couldn't remember doing.

What had his brother Olivier been doing all through the night? An old woman had been found dead. A boy had started before dawn on a breathless race through the streets, breaking the glass of the telephone pillars as he passed them, having wrapped his handkerchief round his fist.

And what was Olivier waiting for at the Gare d'Austerlitz, sometimes in the overheated waiting-rooms, sometimes on the windswept platforms, too nervous to settle down in any one place for long?

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Less than ten minutes elapsed, just time enough for Godin, whose nose really was running, to make himself another glass of hot grog.

"Can I offer you one, Monsieur le Commissaire?"

"No, thanks."

Looking more embarrassed than ever, Saillard leaned over towards Lecœur to say in an undertone:

"Would you like us to question him in another room?"

No. Lecœur wasn't going to leave his post for anything. He wanted to stay there, with his little lamps and his switchboard. Was it that he was thinking more of the boy than of his brother?

Olivier came in with a detective on either side, but they had spared him the handcuffs. He looked dreadful, like a bad photograph faded with age. At once he turned to André.

"Where's François?"

"We don't know. We're hunting for him."

"Where?"

André Lecœur pointed to his plan of Paris and his switchboard of a thousand lines.

"Everywhere."

The two detectives had already been sent away.

"Sit down," said the Inspector. "I believe you've been told of Madame Fayet's death."

Olivier didn't wear spectacles, but he had the same pale and rather fugitive eyes as his brother had when he took his glasses off. He glanced at the Inspector, by whom he didn't seem the least overawed, then turned back to André.

"He left a note for me," he said, delving into one of the pockets of his grubby mackintosh. "Here. See if you can understand."

He held out a bit of paper torn out of a schoolboy's exercise book. The writing wasn't any too good. It didn't look as though François was the best of pupils. He had used an indelible pencil, wetting the end in his mouth, so that his lips were very likely stained with it.

Uncle Gédéon arrives this morning Gare d'Austerlitz. Come as soon as you can and meet us there. Love. Bib.

Without a word, André Lecœur passed it onto the Inspector, who turned it over and over with his thick fingers.

"What's Bib stand for?"

"It's his nickname. A baby name. I never use it when other people are about. It comes from *biberon*. . . . When I used to give him his bottle . . ."

He spoke in a toneless voice. He seemed to be in a fog and was probably only dimly conscious of where he was.

"Who's Uncle Gédéon?"

"There isn't any such person."

Did he realize he was talking to the head of the *Brigade des Homicides*, who was at the moment investigating a murder?

It was his brother who came to the rescue, explaining:

"As a matter of fact, we had an Uncle Gédéon, but he's been dead for

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some years. He was one of my mother's brothers who emigrated to America as a young man."

Olivier looked at his brother as much as to say: "What's the point of going into that?"

"We got into the habit, in the family, of speaking — jocularly, of course — of our rich American uncle and of the fortune he'd leave us one day."

"Was he rich?"

"We didn't know. We never heard from him except for a postcard once a year, signed Gédéon. Wishing us a happy New Year."

"He died?"

"When François was four."

"Really, André. . . . Do you think it's any use. . . ."

"Let me go on. The Inspector wants to know everything. . . . My brother carried on the family tradition, talking to his son about our Uncle Gédéon, who had become by now quite a legendary figure. He provided a theme for bedtime stories, and all sorts of adventures were attributed to him. Naturally he was fabulously rich, and when one day he came back to France . . ."

"I understand. . . . He died out there?"

"In a hospital in Cleveland. It was then we found out he had been really a porter in a restaurant. It would have been too cruel to tell the boy that, so the legend went on."

"Did he believe in it?"

It was Olivier who answered: "My brother thought he didn't, that he'd guessed the truth but wasn't going to spoil the game. But I always maintained the contrary, and I'm still practically certain he took it all in. He was like that. Long after his schoolfellows had stopped believing in Father Christmas, he still went on."

Talking about his son brought him back to life, transfigured him.

"But as for this note he left, I don't know what to make of it. I asked the *concierge* if a telegram had come. For a moment I thought André might have played us a practical joke, but I soon dismissed the idea. It isn't much of a joke to get a boy dashing off to a station on a freezing night. Naturally I dashed off to the Gare d'Austerlitz as fast as I could. There I hunted high and low, then wandered about, waiting anxiously for him to turn up. . . . André, you're sure he hasn't been . . ."

He looked at the street plan on the wall and at the switchboard. He knew very well that every accident was reported.

"He hasn't been run over," said André. "At about eight o'clock he was near the Etoile, but we've completely lost track of him since then."

"Near the Etoile? How do you know?"

"It's rather a long story, but it boils down to this, that a whole series of alarms were set off by someone smashing the glass. They followed a circuitous route from your place to the Arc de Triomphe. At the foot of the last one they found a blue-check

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handkerchief, a boy's handkerchief, among the broken glass."

"He has handkerchiefs like that."

"From eight o'clock onwards, not a sign of him."

"Then I'd better get back to the station. He's certain to go there, if he told me to meet him there."

He was surprised at the sudden silence with which his last words were greeted. He looked from one to the other, perplexed, then anxious.

"What is it?"

His brother looked down at the floor. Inspector Saillard cleared his throat, hesitated, then asked:

"Did you go to see your mother-in-law last night?"

Perhaps, as his brother had suggested, Olivier was rather lacking in intelligence. It took a long time for the words to sink in. You could follow their progress in his features.

He had been gazing rather blankly at the Inspector. Suddenly he swung around on his brother, his cheeks red, his eyes flashing.

"André. You dare to suggest that I . . ."

Without the slightest transition, his indignation faded away. He leaned forward in his chair, took his head in his two hands, and burst into a fit of raucous weeping.

Ill at ease, Inspector Saillard looked at André Lecœur, surprised at the latter's calmness, and a little shocked, perhaps, by what he may well have taken for heartlessness. Perhaps Saillard had never had a brother of his own. André had known his since childhood. It wasn't the first time he had seen Olivier break down. Not by any means. And this time he was almost pleased, as it might have been a great deal worse. What he had dreaded was the moment of indignation, and he was relieved that it had passed so quickly. Had he continued on that tack, he'd have ended by putting everyone's back up, which would have done him no good at all.

Wasn't that how he'd lost one job after another? For weeks, for months, he would go meekly about his work, toeing the line and swallowing what he felt to be humiliations, till all at once he could hold no more, and for some trifle, a chance word, a smile, a harmless contradiction, he would flare up unexpectedly and make a nuisance of himself to everybody.

"What do we do now?" the Inspector's eyes were asking.

André Lecœur's eyes answered: "Wait."

It didn't last very long. The emotional crisis waned, started again, then petered out altogether. Olivier shot a sulky look at the Inspector, then hid his face again.

Finally, with an air of bitter resignation, he sat up, and with even a touch of pride, said:

"Fire away. I'll answer."

"At what time last night did you go to Madame Fayet's. . . . Wait a moment. First of all, when did you leave your flat?"

"At eight o'clock, as usual, after François was in bed."

"Nothing exceptional happened?"

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"No. We'd had supper together. Then he'd helped me to wash up."

"Did you talk about Christmas?"

"Yes. I told him he'd be getting a surprise."

"The table radio. Was he expecting one?"

"He'd been longing for one for some time. You see, he doesn't play with the other boys in the street. Practically all his free time he spends at home."

"Did it ever occur to you that the boy might know you'd lost your job at the *Presse*? Did he ever ring you up there?"

"Never. When I'm at work, he's asleep."

"Could anyone have told him?"

"No one knew. Not in the neighborhood, that is."

"Is he observant?"

"Very. He notices everything."

"You saw him safely in bed, and then you went off. . . . Do you take anything with you — anything to eat, I mean?"

The Inspector suddenly thought of that, seeing Godin produce a ham sandwich. Olivier looked blankly at his empty hands.

"My tin."

"The tin in which you took your sandwiches?"

"Yes. I had it with me when I left. I'm sure of that. I can't think where I could have left it, unless it was at . . ."

"At Madame Fayet's?"

"Yes."

"Just a moment. . . . Lecœur, get me Javel on the 'phone, will you? . . . Hallo! . . . Who's speaking? . . . Is Janvier there? . . . Good. Ask him to speak to me. . . . Hallo! Is that you, Janvier? . . . Have you come across a tin box containing some sandwiches. . . . Nothing of the sort. Really? . . . All the same, I'd like you to make sure. . . . Ring me back. . . . It's important. . . ."

And, turning again to Olivier: "Was François actually sleeping when you left?"

"No. But he'd snuggled down in bed and soon would be. . . . Outside, I wandered about for a bit. I walked down to the Seine and waited on the embankment."

"Waited? What for?"

"For François to be fast asleep. From his room you can see Madame Fayet's windows."

"So you'd made up your mind to go and see her."

"It was the only way. I hadn't a bean left."

"What about your brother?"

Olivier and André looked at each other.

"He'd already given me so much. I felt I couldn't ask him again."

"You rang at the house door, I suppose. . . . At what time?"

"A little after nine. The *concierge* saw me. I made no attempt to hide — except from François."

"Had your mother-in-law gone to bed?"

"No. She was fully dressed, when she opened her door. She said: 'Oh, it's you, you wretch!' "

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"After that beginning did you still think she'd lend you money?"

"I was sure of it."

"Why?"

"It was her business. Perhaps also for the pleasure of squeezing me if I didn't pay her back. She lent me ten thousand francs, but made me sign an I.O.U. for twenty thousand."

"How soon had you to pay her back?"

"In a fortnight's time."

"How could you hope to?"

"I don't know. Somehow. The thing that mattered was for the boy to have a good Christmas."

André Lecœur was tempted to butt in to explain to the puzzled Inspector: "You see! He's always been like that."

"Did you get the money easily?"

"Oh, no. We were at it for a long time."

"How long?"

"Half an hour, I daresay, and during most of that time she was calling me names; telling me I was no good to anyone and had ruined her daughter's life before I finally killed her! I didn't answer her back. I wanted the money too badly."

"You didn't threaten her?"

Olivier reddened.

"Not exactly. I said if she didn't let me have it I'd kill myself."

"Would you have done it?"

"I don't think so. At least, I don't know. I was fed up, worn out."

"And when you got the money?"

"I walked to the nearest Métro station, Lourmel, and took the underground to Palais Royal. There I went into the Grands Magasins du Louvre. The place was crowded, with queues at many of the counters."

"What time was it?"

"It was after eleven before I left the place. I was in no hurry. I had a good look round. I stood a long time watching a toy electric train."

André couldn't help smiling at the Inspector.

"You didn't miss your sandwich tin?"

"No. I was thinking about François and his present."

"And with money in your pocket you banished all your cares!"

The Inspector hadn't known Olivier Lecœur since childhood, but he had sized him up all right. He had hit the nail on the head. When things were black, Olivier would go about with drooping shoulders and a hang-dog air, but no sooner had he a thousand-franc note in his pocket than he'd feel on top of the world.

"To come back to Madame Fayet, you say you gave her a receipt. . . . What did she do with it?"

"She slipped it into an old wallet she always carried about with her in a pocket somewhere under her skirt."

"So you knew about the wallet?"

"Yes. Everybody did."

The Inspector turned towards André.

"It hasn't been found!"

Then to Olivier: "You bought some things. In the Louvre?"

"No. I bought the little radio in the Rue Montmartre."

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"In which shop?"

"I don't know the name. It's next door to a shoe shop."

"And the other things?"

"A little further on."

"What time was it when you'd finished shopping?"

"Close on midnight. People were coming out of the theatres and movies and crowding into the restaurants. Some of them were rather noisy."

His brother at that time was already here at his switchboard.

"What did you do during the rest of the night?"

"At the corner of the Boulevard des Italiens there's a movie that stays open all night. . . ."

"You'd been there before?"

Avoiding his brother's eye, he answered rather sheepishly:

"Two or three times. After all, it costs no more than going into a café and you can stay there as long as you like. It's nice and warm. Some people go there regularly to sleep."

"When was it you decided to go to the movies?"

"As soon as I left Madame Fayet's."

André Lecœur was tempted to intervene once again to say to the Inspector:

"You see, these people who are down and out are not so utterly miserable after all. If they were, they'd never stick it out. They've got a world of their own, in odd corners of which they can take refuge and even amuse themselves."

It was all so like Olivier! With a few notes in his pocket — and Heaven only knew how he was ever going to pay them back — with a few notes in his pocket, his trials were forgotten. He had only one thought: to give his boy a good Christmas. With that secured, he was ready to stand himself a little treat.

So while other families were gathered at table or knelt at Midnight Mass, Olivier went to the movies all by himself. It was the best he could do.

"When did you leave the movie?"

"A little before six."

"What was the film?"

"*Cœurs Ardents*. With a documentary on Eskimos."

"How many times did you see the program?"

"Twice right through, except for the news, which was just coming on again when I left."

André Lecœur knew that all this was going to be verified, if only as a matter of routine. It wasn't necessary, however. Diving into his pockets, Olivier produced the torn-off half of a movie ticket, then another ticket, a pink one.

"Look at that. It's the Métro ticket I had coming home."

It bore the name of the station Opéra, together with the date and the time.

Olivier had been telling the truth. He couldn't have been in Madame Fayet's flat any time between five and six-thirty.

There was a little spark of triumph in his eye, mixed with a touch of disdain. He seemed to be saying to

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them all, including his brother André:

"Because I'm poor and unlucky I come under suspicion. I know — that's the way things are. I don't blame you."

And, funnily enough, it seemed as though all at once the room had grown colder. That was probably because, with Olivier Lecœur cleared of suspicion, everyone's thoughts reverted to the child. As though moved by one impulse, all eyes turned instinctively towards the huge plan on the wall.

Some time had elapsed since any of the lamps had lit up. Certainly it was a quiet morning. On any ordinary day there would be a street accident coming in every few minutes, particularly old women knocked down in the crowded thoroughfares of Montmartre and other overpopulated quarters.

Today the streets were almost empty, emptier than in August, when half Paris is away on holiday.

Half-past eleven. For three and a half hours there'd been no sign of François Lecœur.

"Hallo! . . . Yes, Saillard speaking. . . . Is that Janvier? . . . You say you couldn't find a tin anywhere? . . . Except in her kitchen, of course. . . . Now, look here. . . . Was it you who went through the old girl's clothes? . . . Oh, Gonesse had already done it. . . . There should have been an old wallet in a pocket under her skirt. . . . You're sure there wasn't anything of that sort? . . . That's what Gonesse told you, is it? . . . What's that about the *concierge*? She saw someone go up a little after nine last night. . . . I know. I know who it was. . . . There were people coming in and out the best part of the night? . . . Of course. . . . I'd like you to go back to the house in the Rue Vasco de Gama. See what you can find out about the comings and goings there, particularly on the third floor. . . . Yes. I'll still be here. . . ."

He turned back to the boy's father, who was now sitting humbly in his chair, looking as intimidated as a patient in a doctor's waiting-room.

"You understand why I asked that, don't you? . . . Does François often wake up in the course of the night?"

"He's been known to get up in his sleep."

"Does he walk about?"

"No. Generally he doesn't even get right out of bed — just sits up and calls out. It's always the same thing. He thinks the house is on fire. His eyes are open, but I don't think he sees anything. Then, little by little, he calms down and with a deep sigh lies down again. The next day he doesn't remember a thing."

"Is he always asleep when you get back in the morning?"

"Not always. But if he isn't he always pretends to be, so that I can wake him up as usual with a hug."

"The people in the house were probably making more noise than usual last night. Who have you got in the next flat?"

"A Czech who works at Renault's."

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"Is he married?"

"I really don't know. There are so many people in the house and they change so often we don't know much about them. All I can tell you is that on Sundays other Czechs come there and they sing a lot of their own songs."

"Janvier will tell us whether there was a party there last night. If there was, they may well have awakened the boy. Besides, children are apt to sleep more lightly when they're excited about a present they're expecting. If he got out of bed, he might easily have looked out of the window, in which case he might have seen you at Madame Fayet's. He didn't know she was his grandmother, did he?"

"No. He didn't like her. He sometimes passed her in the street and he used to say she smelled like a squashed bug."

The boy would probably know what he was talking about. A house like his was no doubt infested with vermin.

"He'd have been surprised to see you with her?"

"Certainly."

"Did he know she lent money?"

"Everyone knew."

"Would there be anybody working at the *Presse* on a day like this?"

"There's always somebody there."

The Inspector asked André to ring them up.

"See if anyone's ever been round to ask for your brother."

Olivier looked uncomfortable, but when his brother reached for the telephone directory, he gave him the number. Both he and the Inspector stared at André while he got through.

"It's very important, Mademoiselle. It may even be a matter of life and death. . . . Yes, please. . . . See if you can find out. Ask everybody who's in the building now. . . . What? . . . Yes, I know it's Christmas Day. . . . It's Christmas Day here, too, but we have to carry on just the same!"

Between his teeth he muttered: "Silly little bitch!"

He could hear the linotypes clicking as he held the line, waiting for her answer.

"Yes. . . . What? . . . Three weeks ago. . . . A young boy. . . ."

Olivier went pale in the face. His eyes dropped, and during the rest of the conversation he stared obstinately at his hands.

"He didn't telephone? . . . Came round himself. . . . At what time? . . . On a Thursday, you say. . . . What did he want? . . . Asked if Olivier Lecœur worked there? . . . What? . . . What was he told?"

Looking up, Olivier saw a flush spread over his brother's face before he banged down the receiver.

——"François went there one Thursday afternoon. He must have suspected something. . . . They told him you hadn't been working there for some time."

There was no point in repeating what he had heard. What they'd said to the boy was:

"We chucked the old fool out weeks ago."

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Perhaps not out of cruelty. They may not have thought it was the man's son they were speaking to.

"Do you begin to understand, Olivier?"

Did he realize that the situation was the reverse of what he had imagined? He had been going off at night, armed with his little box of sandwiches, keeping up an elaborate pretense. And in the end he had been the one to be taken in!

The boy had found him out. And wasn't it only fair to suppose that he had seen through the Uncle Gédéon story too?

He hadn't said a word. He had simply fallen in with the game.

No one dared say anything, for fear of saying too much, for fear of evoking images that would be heartrending.

A father and a son each lying to avoid hurting the other. . . .

They had to look at it through the eyes of a child, with all childhood's tragic earnestness. His father kisses him good night and goes off to the job that doesn't really exist, saying:

"Sleep well. . . . There'll be a surprise for you in the morning. . . ."

A radio. It could only be that. And didn't he know that his father's pockets were empty? Did he try to go to sleep? Or did he get up as soon as his father had gone, to sit miserably staring out of the window obsessed by one thought?

His father had no money — yet was going to buy him a radio!

To the accompaniment, in all probability, of a full-throated Czech choir singing their national songs on the other side of the thin wall!

The Inspector sighed and knocked out his pipe on his heel.

"It looks as though he saw you at Madame Fayet's."

Olivier nodded.

"We'll check up on this, but it seems likely that, looking down from his window, he wouldn't see very far into the room."

"That's quite right."

"Could he have seen you leave the room?"

"No. The door's on the opposite side from the window."

"Do you remember going near the window?"

"At one time I was sitting on the window-sill."

"Was the window open then? We know it was later."

"It was open a few inches. I'm sure of that, because I moved away from it, as I felt an icy draught on my back. She lived with us for a while, just after our marriage, and I know she couldn't bear not to have her window open all the year round. You see, she'd been brought up in the country."

"So there'd be no frost on the panes. He'd certainly have seen you if he was looking."

A call. Lecœur thrust his contact plug into one of the sockets.

"Yes. . . . What's that? . . . A boy? . . ."

The other two held their breath.

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"Yes. . . . Yes. . . . What? . . . Yes. Send out the *agents cyclistes:* Comb the whole neighborhood. I'll see about the station. . . . How long ago was it? . . . Half an hour? . . . Couldn't he have let us know sooner? . . ."

Without losing time over explanations, Lecœur plugged in to the Gare du Nord.

"Hallo! . . . Gare du Nord! Who's speaking? . . . Ah, Lambert. . . . Listen, this is urgent. Have the station searched from end to end. Ask everybody if they've seen a boy of ten wandering about. . . . What? . . . Alone? . . . He may be. . . . Or he may be accompanied. We don't know. . . . Let me know what you find out. . . . Yes, of course. Grab him at once if you set eyes on him. . . ."

"Did you say accompanied?" asked Olivier anxiously.

"Why not? It's possible. Anything's possible. . . . Of course, it may not be him. If it is, we're half an hour late. It was a small grocer in the Rue de Maubeuge whose shop-front is open onto the street. . . . He saw a boy snatch a couple of oranges and make off. . . . He didn't run after him. Only later, when a policeman passed, he thought he might as well mention it. . . ."

"Had your son any money?" asked the Inspector.

"Not a sou."

"Hasn't he got a money-box?"

"Yes. But I borrowed what was in it two days ago, saying that I didn't want to change a banknote."

A pathetic little confession, but what did things like that matter now?

"Don't you think it would be better if I went to the Gare du Nord myself?"

"I doubt if it would help, and we may need you here."

They were almost prisoners in that room. With its direct links with every nerve-centre of Paris, that was the place where any news would first arrive. Even in his room in the *Police Judiciaire*, the Inspector would be less well placed. He had thought of going back there, but now at last took off his overcoat, deciding to see the job through where he was.

"If he had no money, he couldn't take a bus or the Métro. Nor could he go into a café or use a public telephone. He probably hasn't had anything to eat since his supper last night."

"But what can he be doing?" exclaimed Olivier, becoming more and more nervous. "And why should he have sent me to the Gare d'Austerlitz?"

"Perhaps to help you get away," grunted Saillard.

"Get away? Me?"

"Listen. . . . The boy knows you're down and out. Yet you're going to buy him a little radio. . . . I'm not reproaching you. I'm just looking at the facts. He leans on the window-sill and sees you with the old woman he knows to be a moneylender. What does he conclude?"

"I see. . . ."

"That you've gone to her to borrow

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money. He may be touched by it, he may be saddened — we don't know. . . . He goes back to bed and to sleep."

"You think so?"

"I'm pretty sure of it. Anyhow, we've no reason to think he left the house then."

"No. Of course not."

"Let's say he goes back to sleep, then. . . . But he wakes up early, as children mostly do on Christmas Day. . . . And the first thing he notices is the frost on the window. The first frost this winter, don't forget that. He wants to look at it, to touch it. . . ."

A faint smile flickered across André Lecœur's face. This massive Inspector hadn't forgotten what it was like to be a boy.

"He scratches a bit of it away with his nails. . . . It won't be difficult to get confirmation, for once the frost is tampered with it can't form again in quite the same pattern. . . . What does he notice then? . . . That in the buildings opposite one window is lit up, and one only — the window of the room in which a few hours before he had seen his father. It's guesswork, of course, but I don't mind betting he saw the body, or part of it. If he'd merely seen a foot it would have been enough to startle him."

"You mean to say . . ." began Olivier, wide-eyed.

"That he thought you'd killed her. As I did myself — for a moment. And very likely not her only. Just think for a minute. . . . The man who's been committing all these murders is a man, like you, who wanders about at night. His victims live in the poorer quarters of Paris, like Madame Fayet in the Rue Michat. Does the boy know anything of how you've been spending your nights since you lost your job? No. All that he has to go on is that he has seen you in the murdered woman's room. Would it be surprising if his imagination got to work?

"You said just now that you sat on the window-sill. Might it be there that you put down your box of sandwiches?"

"Now I come to think of it. . . . Yes. . . . I'm practically sure."

"Then he saw it. . . . And he's quite old enough to know what the police would think when they saw it lying there. . . . Is your name on it?"

"Yes. Scratched on the lid."

"You see! He thought you'd be coming home as usual between seven and eight. The thing was to get you as quickly as possible out of the danger zone."

"You mean . . . By writing me that note?"

"Yes. He didn't know what to say. He couldn't refer to the murder without compromising you. Then he thought of Uncle Gédéon. Whether he believed in his existence or not doesn't matter. He knew you'd go to the Gare d'Austerlitz."

"But he's not yet eleven!"

"Boys of that age know a lot more

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than you think. Doesn't he read detective stories?"

"Yes."

"Of course, he does. They all do. If they don't read them, they get them on the radio. Perhaps that's why he wanted a set of his own so badly."

"It's true."

"He couldn't stay in the flat to wait for you, for he had something more important to do. He had to get hold of that box. . . . I suppose he knew the courtyard well. . . . He'd played there, hadn't he?"

"At one time, yes. . . . With the *concierge's* little girl."

"So he'd know about the rainwater pipes, may even have climbed up them for sport."

"Very well," said Olivier, suddenly calm, "let's say he gets into the room and takes the box. He wouldn't need to climb down the way he'd come. He could simply walk out of the flat and out of the house. You can open the house door from inside without knocking up the *concierge*. . . . You say it was at about six o'clock, don't you?"

"I see what you're driving at," grunted the Inspector. "Even at a leisurely pace it would hardly have taken him two hours to walk to the Gare d'Austerlitz. Yet he wasn't there. . . ."

Leaving them to thrash it out, André Lecœur was busy telephoning.

"No news yet?"

And the man at the Gare du Nord answered:

"Nothing so far. We've pounced on any number of boys, but none of them was François Lecœur."

Admittedly any street boy could have pinched a couple of oranges and taken to his heels. The same couldn't be said for the broken glass of the telephone pillars, however. André Lecœur looked once again at the column with the seven crosses, as though some clue might suddenly emerge from them. He had never thought himself much cleverer than his brother. Where he scored was in patience and perseverance.

"If the box of sandwiches is ever found it'll be at the bottom of the Seine near the Pont Mirabeau," he said.

Steps in the corridor. On an ordinary day they would not have been noticed, but in the stillness of a Christmas morning everyone listened.

It was an *agent cycliste*, who produced a bloodstained blue-check handkerchief, the one that had been found among the glass splinters at the seventh telephone pillar.

"That's his, all right," said the boy's father.

"He must have been followed," said the Inspector. "If he'd had time, he wouldn't merely have broken the glass. He'd have said something."

"Who by?" asked Olivier, who was the only one not to understand. "Who'd want to follow him? And why should he call the police?"

They hesitated to put him wise. In the end it was his brother who explained:

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"When he went to the old woman's he thought you were the murderer. When he came away he knew you weren't. He knew . . ."

"Knew what?"

"He knew who was. Do you understand now? He found out something, though we don't know what. He wants to tell us about it, but someone's stopping him."

"You mean?"

"I mean that François is after the murderer or the murderer after him. One is following, one is followed — we don't know which. By the way, Inspector, is there a reward offered?"

"A handsome reward was offered after the third murder and it was doubled last week. It's been in all the papers."

"Then my guess," said André Lecœur, "is that it's the kid who's doing the following. Only in that case . . ."

It was twelve o'clock, four hours since they'd lost track of him. Unless, of course, it was he who had snaffled the oranges in the Rue Maubeuge. . . .

Might not this be his great moment? André Lecœur had read somewhere that even to the dullest and most uneventful lives such a moment comes sooner or later.

He had never had a particularly high opinion of himself or of his abilities. When people asked him why he'd chosen so dreary and monotonous a job rather than one in, say, the *Brigade des Homicides*, he would answer:

"I suppose I'm lazy."

Sometimes he would add:

"I'm scared of being knocked about."

As a matter of fact, he was neither lazy nor a coward. If he lacked anything it was brains.

He knew it. All he had learned at school had cost him a great effort. The police exams, that others took so easily in their stride, he had only passed by dint of perseverance.

Was it a consciousness of his own shortcomings that had kept him single? Possibly. It seemed to him that the sort of woman he would want to marry would be his superior, and he didn't relish the idea of playing second fiddle in the home.

But he wasn't thinking of all this now. Indeed, if this was his moment of greatness, it was stealing upon him unawares.

Another team arrived, those of the second day-shift, looking very fresh and well-groomed in their Sunday clothes. They had been celebrating Christmas in their families, and they brought in with them, as it were, a whiff of good viands and liqueurs.

Old Bedeau had taken his place at the switchboard, but Lecœur made no move to go.

"I'll stay on a bit," he said simply.

Inspector Saillard had gone for a quick lunch at the Brasserie Dauphine, just round the corner, leaving strict injunctions that he was to be fetched at once if anything happened. Janvier was back at the Quai des Orfèvres, writing up his report.

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If Lecœur was tired, he didn't notice it. He certainly wasn't sleepy and couldn't bear the thought of going home to bed. He had plenty of stamina. Once, when there were riots in the Place de la Concorde, he had done thirty-six hours non-stop, and on another occasion, during a general strike, they had all camped in the room for four days and nights.

His brother showed the strain more. He was getting jumpy again.

"I'm going," he announced suddenly.

"Where to?"

"To find Bib."

"Where?"

"I don't know exactly. . . . I'll start round the Gare du Nord."

"How do you know it was Bib who stole the oranges? He may be at the other end of Paris. We might get news at any minute. You'd better stay."

"I can't stand this waiting."

He was nevertheless persuaded to. He was given a chair in a corner. He refused to lie down. His eyes were red with anxiety and fatigue. He sat fidgeting, looking rather as, when a boy, he had been put in the corner.

With more self-control, André forced himself to take some rest. Next to the big room was a little one with a wash-basin, where they hung their coats and which was provided with a couple of camp beds on which the *nuiteux* could lie down during a quiet hour.

He shut his eyes, but only for a moment. Then his hand felt for the little notebook which never left him, and lying on his back he began to turn over the pages.

There were nothing but crosses, columns and columns of tiny little crosses which, month after month, year after year he had accumulated, Heaven knows why. Just to satisfy something inside him. After all, other people keep a diary, or the most meticulous household accounts even when they don't need to economize at all.

Those crosses told the story of the night life of Paris.

"Some coffee, Lecœur?"

"Thanks."

Feeling rather out of touch where he was, he dragged his camp bed into the big room, placing it in a position from which he could see the wall-plan. There he sipped his coffee, after which he stretched himself out again, sometimes studying his notebook, sometimes lying with his eyes shut. Now and again he stole a glance at his brother, who sat hunched in his chair, with drooping shoulders, the twitching of his long, white fingers being the only sign of the torture he was enduring.

There were hundreds of men now, not only in Paris but in the suburbs, keeping their eyes skinned for the boy whose description had been circulated. Sometimes false hopes were raised, only to be dashed when the exact particulars were given.

Lecœur shut his eyes again, but opened them suddenly next moment, as though he had actually dozed off.

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He glanced at the clock, then looked round for the Inspector.

"Hasn't Saillard got back yet?" he asked, getting to his feet.

"I expect he's looked in at the Quai des Orfèvres."

Olivier stared at his brother, surprised to see him pacing up and down the room. The latter was so absorbed in his thoughts that he hardly noticed that the sun had broken through the clouds, bathing Paris on that Christmas afternoon in a glow of light more like that of spring.

While thinking, he listened, and it wasn't long before he heard Inspector Saillard's heavy tread outside.

"You'd better go and get some sandwiches," he said to his brother. "Get some for me, too."

"What kind?"

"Ham. Anything. Whatever you find."

Olivier went out, after a parting glance at the map, relieved, in spite of his anxiety, to be doing something.

The men of the afternoon shift knew little of what was afoot, except that the killer had done another job the previous night, and that there was a general hunt for a small boy. For them, the case couldn't have the flavor it had for those who were involved. At the switchboard, Bedeau was doing a crossword with his earphones on his head, breaking off from time to time for the classic:

"Hallo! Austerlitz. . . . Your car's out."

A body fished out of the Seine. You couldn't have a Christmas without that!

"Could I have a word with you, Inspector?"

The camp bed was back in the cloakroom. It was there that Lecœur led the chief of the homicide squad.

"I hope you won't mind my butting in. . . . I know it isn't for me to make suggestions. . . . But, about the killer. . . ."

He had his little notebook in his hand. He must have known its contents almost by heart.

"I've been doing a lot of thinking since this morning, and . . ."

A little while ago, while he was lying down, it had seemed so clear, but now that he had to explain things, it was difficult to put them in logical order.

"It's like this. . . . First of all, I noticed that all the murders were committed after two in the morning, most of them after three. . . ."

He could see by the look on the Inspector's face that he hadn't exactly scored a hit, and he hurried on:

"I've been looking up the times of other murders over the past three years. They were nearly always between ten in the evening and two in the morning."

Neither did that observation seem to make much impression. Why not take the bull by the horns and say straight out what was on his mind?

"Just now, looking at my brother, it occurred to me that the man you're looking for might be a man like him. As a matter of fact I, too,

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for a moment wondered whether it wasn't him. . . . Wait a moment. . . ."

That was better. The look of polite boredom had gone from Saillard's face.

"If I'd had more experience in this sort of work I'd be able to explain myself better. . . . But you'll see in a moment. . . . A man who's killed eight people one after the other is, if not a madman, at any rate a man who's been thrown off his balance. He might have had a sudden shock. Take my brother, for instance. When he lost his job it upset him so much that he preferred to live in a tissue of lies rather than let his son . . ."

No. Put into words it all sounded very clumsy.

"When a man suddenly loses everything he has in life . . ."

"He doesn't necessarily go mad."

"I'm not saying he's actually mad. But imagine a person so full of resentment that he considers himself justified in revenging himself on his fellow-men. . . . I don't need to point out to you, Inspector, that other murderers always kill in much the same way. This one has used a hammer, a knife, a spanner, and one woman he strangled. . . . And he's never been seen, never left a clue. Wherever he lives in Paris, he must have walked miles and miles at night when there was no transport available, sometimes, when the alarm had been given, with the police on the look-out, questioning everybody they found in the streets. How is it he avoided them?"

He was certain he was on the right track. If only Saillard would hear him out. . . .

The Inspector sat on one of the camp beds. The cloakroom was small, and as Lecœur paced up and down in front of him, he could do no more than three paces each way.

"This morning, for instance, assuming he was with the boy, he went halfway across Paris, keeping out of sight of every police station and every traffic point where there'd be a man on duty."

"You mean he knows the 15th and 16th *arrondissements* by heart?"

"And not those only. At least two others, the 12th and the 20th, as he showed on previous occasions. . . . He didn't choose his victims haphazardly. He knew they lived alone and could be done in without any great risk."

What a nuisance! There was his brother, saying: "Here are the sandwiches, André."

"Thanks. Go ahead, will you? . . . Don't wait for me, I'll be with you in a moment."

He bundled Olivier back into his corner and returned to the cloakroom. He didn't want him to hear.

"If he's used a different weapon each time, it's because he knows it will puzzle us. He knows that murderers generally have their own way and stick to it."

The Inspector had risen to his feet and was staring at André with a far-

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away look, as though he was following a train of thought of his own.

"You mean that he's . . ."

"That he's one of us — or has been. . . . I can't get the idea out of my head."

He lowered his voice.

"Someone who's been up against it in the same sort of way as my brother. A discharged fireman might take to arson. It's happened two or three times. . . . A policeman . . ."

"But why should he steal?"

"Wasn't my brother in need of money? . . . This other chap may be like him in more ways than one. Supposing he, too, was a night worker and goes on pretending he's still in a job. That would explain why the crimes are committed so late. He has to be out all night. The first part of it is easy enough — the cafés and bars are open. . . . Afterwards he's all alone with himself."

As though to himself, Saillard muttered: "There wouldn't be anybody in the personnel department on a day like this."

"Perhaps you could ring up the director at his home. He might remember."

"Hallo! Can I speak to Monsieur Guillaume, please? . . . He's not in? . . . Where could I reach him? . . . At his daughter's in Auteuil? . . . Have you got the number? . . .

"Hallo! . . . Monsieur Guillaume? . . . Saillard speaking. I hope I'm not disturbing you too much. . . . Oh, you'd finished, had you? Good. . . . It's about the killer. . . . Yes, there's been another one. . . . No. Nothing definite. Only we have an idea that needs checking, and it's urgent. Don't be too surprised at my question. Has any member of the Paris police been sacked recently, say, two or three months ago? . . . I beg your pardon? . . . Not a single one this year. . . . I see. . . ."

Lecœur felt a sudden constriction round his heart as though overwhelmed by a catastrophe, and threw a pathetic despairing look at the wall-map. He had already given up and was surprised to hear his chief go on:

"As a matter of fact, it doesn't need to be as recent as all that. It would be someone who had worked in various parts of Paris, including the 15th and 16th. Probably also the 12th and 20th. Seems to have done a good deal of night work. Also to have been embittered by his dismissal. . . . What? . . ."

The way Saillard pronounced that last word gave Lecœur renewed hope.

"Sergeant Loubet? . . . Yes. I remember the name, though I never actually came across him. Three years ago! . . . You wouldn't know where he lived, I suppose? . . . Somewhere near Les Halles? . . ."

Three years ago. No. It wouldn't do, and Lecœur's heart sank again. You could hardly expect a man to bottle up his resentments for three years and then suddenly start hitting back.

"Have you any idea what became of him? . . . No. Of course not.

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. . . And it's not a good day for finding out. . . ."

He hung up and looked thoughtfully at Lecœur. When he spoke, it was as though he was addressing an equal.

"Did you hear? . . . Sergeant Loubet. He was constantly getting into trouble and was shifted three or four times before being finally dismissed. Drink. That was his trouble. . . . He took his dismissal very hard. Guillaume can't say for certain what has become of him, but he thinks he joined a private detective agency. . . . If you'd like to have a try. . . ."

Lecœur set to work. He had little hope of succeeding, but it was better to do something than sit watching for the little lamps in the street plan. He began with the agencies of the most doubtful reputation, refusing to believe that a person such as Loubet would readily find a job with a reputable firm. Most of the offices were shut, and he had to ring up their proprietors at home.

"Don't know him. You'd better try Tisserand, in the Boulevard Saint-Martin. He's the one who takes all the riff-raff."

But Tisserand, a firm that specialized in shadowings, was no good either.

"Don't speak to me of that good-for-nothing. It's a good two months or more since I chucked him out, in spite of his threatening to blackmail me. If he ever shows up at my office again, I'll throw him down the stairs."

"What sort of job did he have?"

"Night work. Watching blocks of flats."

"Did he drink much?"

"He wasn't often sober. I don't know how he managed it, but he always knew where to get free drinks. Blackmail again, I suppose."

"Can you give me his address?"

"27 bis, Rue du Pas-de-la-Mule."

"Does he have a telephone?"

"Maybe. I don't know. I've never had the slightest desire to ring him up. Is that all? Can I go back to my game of bridge?"

The Inspector had already snatched up the telephone directory and was looking for Loubet's number. He rang up himself. There was now a tacit understanding between him and Lecœur. They shared the same hope, the same trembling eagerness, while Olivier, realizing that something important was going on, came and stood near them.

Without being invited, André did something he wouldn't have dreamed of doing that morning. He picked up the second earphone to listen in. The bell rang in the flat in the Rue du Pas-de-la-Mule. It rang for a long time, as though the place was deserted, and his anxiety was becoming acute when at last it stopped and a voice answered.

Thank Heaven! It was a woman's voice, an elderly one. "Is that you at last? Where are you?"

"Hallo! This isn't your husband here, Madame."

"Has he met with an accident?"

From the hopefulness of her tone

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it sounded as though she had long been expecting one and wouldn't be sorry when it happened.

"It is Madame Loubet I'm speaking to, isn't it?"

"Who else would it be?"

"Your husband's not at home?"

"First of all, who are you?"

"Inspector Saillard."

"What do you want him for?"

The Inspector put his hand over the mouthpiece to say to Lecœur:

"Get through to Janvier. Tell him to dash round there as quick as he can."

"Didn't your husband come home this morning?"

"You ought to know! I thought the police knew everything!"

"Does it often happen?"

"That's his business, isn't it?"

No doubt she hated her drunkard of a husband, but now that he was threatened she was ready to stand up for him.

"I suppose you know he no longer belongs to the Police Force."

"Perhaps he found a cleaner job!"

"When did he stop working for the Agence Argus?"

"What's that? . . . What are you getting at? . . ."

"I assure you, Madame, your husband was dismissed from the Agence Argus over two months ago."

"You're lying."

"Which means that for these last two months he's been going off to work every evening. . . ."

"Where else would he be going? To the Folies-Bergère?"

"Have you any idea why he hasn't come back today? He hasn't telephoned, has he?"

She must have been afraid of saying the wrong thing, for she rang off without another word.

When the Inspector put his receiver down he turned round to see Lecœur standing behind him, looking away. In a shaky voice, the latter said:

"Janvier's on his way now."

—

He was treated as an equal. He knew it wouldn't last, that tomorrow, sitting at his switchboard, he would be once more but a small cog in the huge wheel.

The others simply didn't count, Not even his brother, whose timid eyes darted from one to the other uncomprehendingly, wondering why, if his boy's life was in danger, they talked so much instead of doing something.

Twice he had to pluck at André's sleeve to get a word in edgewise.

"Let me go and look for him myself," he begged.

What could he do? The hunt had widened now. A description of ex-Sergeant Loubet had been passed to all police stations and patrols.

It was no longer only a boy of ten who was being looked for, but also a man of fifty-eight, probably the worse for drink, dressed in a black overcoat with a velvet collar and an old gray felt hat, a man who knew his Paris like the palm of his hand, and who was acquainted with the police.

Janvier had returned, looking

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fresher than the men there, in spite of his night's vigil.

"She tried to slam the door in my face, but I'd taken the precaution of sticking my foot in. She doesn't know anything. She says he's been handing over his pay every month."

"That's why he had to steal. He didn't need big sums; in fact, he wouldn't have known what to do with them. What's she like?"

"Small and dark, with piercing eyes. Her hair's dyed a sort of blue. She must have eczema or something of the sort, as she wears mittens."

"Did you get a photo of him?"

"There was one on the dining-room sideboard. She wouldn't give it to me, so I just took it."

A heavy-built, florid man, with bulging eyes, who in his youth had probably been the village beau and had conserved an air of stupid arrogance. The photograph was some years old. No doubt he looked quite different now.

"She didn't give you any idea where he was likely to be, did she?"

"As far as I could make out, except at night, when he was supposed to be at work, she kept him pretty well tied to her apron strings. I talked to the *concierge*, who told me he was scared stiff of his wife. Often she's seen him stagger home in the morning, then suddenly pull himself together when he went upstairs. He goes out shopping with his wife; in fact, he never goes out alone in the daytime. If she goes out when he's in bed, she locks him in."

"What do you think, Lecœur?"

"I'm wondering whether my nephew and he aren't together."

"What do you mean?"

"They weren't together at the beginning, or Loubet would have stopped the boy giving the alarm. There must have been some distance between them. One was following the other."

"Which way round?"

"When the kid climbed up the drain-pipe he thought his father was guilty. Otherwise, why should he have sent him off to the Gare d'Austerlitz, where no doubt he intended to join him after getting rid of the sandwich tin?"

"It looks like it."

"No, André. François could never have thought . . ."

"Leave this alone. You don't understand. . . . At that time the crime had certainly been committed. François wouldn't have dreamed of burgling someone's flat for a tin box if it hadn't been that he'd seen the body."

"From his window," put in Janvier, "he could see most of the legs."

"What we don't know is whether the murderer was still there."

"I can't believe he was," said Saillard. "If he had been, he'd have kept out of sight, let the boy get into the room, and then done the same to him as he'd done to the old woman."

"Look here, Olivier. . . . When you got home this morning was the light on?"

"Yes."

"In the boy's room?"

"Yes. It was the first thing I no-

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ticed. It gave me a shock. I thought perhaps he was ill."

"So the murderer very likely saw it and feared his crime had had a witness. He certainly wouldn't have expected anyone to climb up the drain-pipe. He must have rushed straight out of the house. . . ."

"And waited outside to see what would happen."

Guesswork! Yes. But that was all they could do. The important thing was to guess right. For that you had to put yourself in the other chap's place and think as he had thought. The rest was a matter of patrols, of the hundreds of policemen scattered all over Paris, and, lastly, of luck.

"Rather than go down the way he'd come the boy must have left the house by the entrance in the Rue Michat."

"Just a moment, Inspector. . . . By that time he probably knew that his father wasn't the murderer."

"Why?"

"Janvier said just now that Madame Fayet lost a lot of blood. If it had been his father, the blood would have had time to dry up more or less. It was some nine hours since François had seen him in the room. . . .

"It was on leaving the house that he found out who had done it, whether it was Loubet or not. The latter wouldn't know whether the boy had seen him up in the room. François would have been scared and taken to his heels. . . ."

This time it was the boy's father who interrupted.

"No. Not if he knew there was a big reward offered. Not if he knew I'd lost my job. Not if he'd seen me go to the old woman to borrow some money."

The Inspector and André Lecœur exchanged glances. They had to admit Olivier was right, and it made them afraid.

No, it had to be pictured otherwise. A dark, deserted street in an outlying quarter of Paris two hours before dawn.

On the other hand, the ex-policeman, obsessed by his sense of grievance, who had just committed his ninth murder, to revenge himself on the society that had spurned him, and perhaps still more to prove to himself he was still a man by defying the whole police force — indeed, the whole world.

Was he drunk again? On a night like that, when the bars were open long after their usual closing time, he had no doubt had more than ever. And in that dark, silent street, what did he see with his bulging drink-inflamed eyes? A young boy, the first person who had found him out, and who would now . . .

"I'd like to know whether he's got a gun on him," sighed the Inspector.

Janvier answered at once: "I asked his wife. It seems he always carries one about, an automatic pistol, but it's not loaded."

"How can she know that?"

"Once or twice, when he was more than usually drunk, he rounded on her, threatening her with the gun. After that she got hold of his am-

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munition and locked it up, telling him an unloaded pistol was quite enough to frighten people without his having to fire it."

Had those two really stalked each other through the streets of Paris? A strange sort of duel in which the man had the strength and the boy the speed.

The boy may well have been scared, but the man stood for something precious enough to push fear into the background: a fortune and the end of his father's worries and humiliations.

Having got so far, there wasn't a lot more to be said by the little group of people waiting in the Préfecture de Police. They sat gazing at the street plan with a picture in their minds of a boy following a man, the boy no doubt keeping his distance. Everyone else was sleeping. There was no one in the streets who could be a help to the one or a menace to the other. Had Loubet produced his gun in an attempt to frighten the boy away?

When people woke up and began coming out into the streets, what would the boy do then? Would he rush up to the first person he met and start screaming "Murder"?

"Yes. It was Loubet who walked in front," said Saillard slowly.

"And it was I," put in André Lecœur, "who told the boy all about the pillar telephone system."

The little crosses came to life. What had at first been mysterious was now almost simple. But it was tragic.

The child was risking his skin to save his father. Tears were slowly trickling down the latter's face. He made no attempt to hide them.

He was in a strange place, surrounded by outlandish objects, and by people who talked to him as though he wasn't there, as though he was someone else. And his brother was among these people, a brother he could hardly recognize and whom he regarded with instinctive respect.

Even when they did speak, it wasn't necessary to say much. They understood each other. A word sufficed.

"Loubet couldn't go home, of course."

André Lecœur smiled suddenly as a thought struck him.

"It didn't occur to him that François hadn't a centime in his pocket. He could have escaped by diving into the Métro."

No. That wouldn't hold water. The boy had seen him and would give his description.

Place du Trocadéro, the Etoile. The time was passing. It was practically broad daylight. People were up and about. Why hadn't François called for help? Anyhow, with people in the streets it was no longer possible for Loubet to kill him.

The Inspector was deep in thought.

"For one reason or another," he murmured, "I think they're going about together now."

At the same moment a lamp lit up on the wall. As though he knew it would be for him, Lecœur answered in place of Bedeau.

"Yes. I thought as much. . . ."

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"It's about the two oranges. They've found an Arab boy asleep in the third-class waiting-room at the Gare du Nord. He still had the oranges in his pockets. He'd run away from home because his father had beaten him."

"Do you think Bib's dead?"

"If he was dead Loubet would have gone home, as he would no longer have anything to fear."

So the struggle was still going on somewhere in this now sunny Paris in which families were sauntering along the boulevards taking the air.

It would be the fear of losing him in the crowd that had brought François close to his quarry. Why didn't he call for help? No doubt because Loubet had threatened him with his gun.

"One word from you, my lad, and I'll empty this into your guts. . . ."

So each was pursuing his own goal: for the one to shake off the boy somehow, for the other to watch for the moment when the murderer was off his guard and give the alarm before he had time to shoot.

It was a matter of life and death.

"Loubet isn't likely to be in the centre of the town, where policemen are too plentiful for his liking, to say nothing of the fact that many of them know him by sight."

Their most likely direction from the Etoile was towards Montmartre, not to the amusement quarter, but to the remoter and quieter parts.

It was half-past two. Had they had anything to eat? Had Loubet, with his mind set on escape, been able to resist the temptation to drink?

"*Monsieur le Commissaire* . . ."

André Lecœur couldn't speak with the assurance he would have liked. He couldn't get rid of the feeling that he was an upstart, if not a usurper.

"I know there are thousands of little bars in Paris. . . . But if we chose the more likely districts and put plenty of men on the job . . ."

Not only were all the men there roped in, but Saillard got through to the *Police Judiciaire*, where there were six men on duty, and set every one of them to work on six different telephone lines.

"Hallo! . . . Is that the Bar des Amis? . . . In the course of the day have you seen a middle-aged man accompanied by a boy of ten? The man's wearing a black overcoat and a . . ."

Again Lecœur made little crosses, not in his notebook this time, but in the telephone directory. There were ten pages of bars, some of them with the weirdest of names.

A plan of Paris was spread out on a table all ready and it was in a little alley of ill-repute behind the Place Clichy that the Inspector was able to make the first mark in red chalk.

"Yes, there was a man of that description here about twelve o'clock. He drank three glasses of Calvados and ordered a glass of white wine for the boy. The boy didn't want to drink at first, but he did in the end and he wolfed a couple of eggs. . . ."

By the way Olivier Lecœur's face

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lit up you might have thought he heard his boy's voice.

"You don't know which way they went?"

"Toward the Boulevard des Batignolles, I think. . . . The man looked as though he'd already had one or two before he came in."

"Hallo! . . . Zanzi-Bar? . . . Have you at any time seen a . . ."

It became a refrain. As soon as one man had finished, the same words, or practically the same, were repeated by his neighbor.

Rue Damrémont. Montmartre again, only farther out this time. One thirty. Loubet had broken a glass, his movements by this time being somewhat clumsy. The boy got up and made off in the direction of the lavatory, but when the man followed, he thought better of it and went back to his seat.

"Yes. The boy did look a bit frightened. . . . As for the man, he was laughing and smirking as though he was enjoying a huge joke."

"Do you hear that, Olivier? Bib was still there at one-forty."

André Lecœur dared not say what was in his mind. The struggle was nearing its climax. Now that Loubet had really started drinking it was just a question of time. The only thing was: would the boy wait long enough?

It was all very well for Madame Loubet to say the gun wasn't loaded. The butt of an automatic was quite hard enough to crack a boy's skull.

His eyes wandered to his brother, and he had a vision of what Olivier might well have come to if his asthma hadn't prevented him drinking.

"Hallo! . . . Yes. . . . Where? . . . Boulevard Ney? . . ."

They had reached the outskirts of Paris. The ex-sergeant seemed still to have his wits about him. Little by little, in easy stages, he was leading the boy to one of those outlying districts where there were still empty building-sites and desolate spaces.

Three police cars were promptly switched to that neighborhood, as well as every available *agent cycliste* within reach. Even Janvier dashed off, taking the Inspector's little car, and it was all they could do to prevent Olivier from running after him.

"I tell you, you'd much better stay here. He may easily go off on a false trail, and then you won't know anything."

Nobody had time for making coffee. The men of the second day-shift had now thoroughly warmed to the case. Everyone was strung up.

"Hallo! . . . Yes. . . . Orient-Bar. . . . What is it?"

It was André Lecœur who took the call. With the receiver to his ear he rose to his feet, making queer signs that brought the whole room to a hush.

"What? . . . Don't speak so close to the mouthpiece. . . ."

In the silence the others could hear a high-pitched voice.

"It's for the police. . . . Tell the police I've got him. . . . The killer. . . . Hallo! . . . What? Is that Uncle André?"

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The voice was lowered a tone to say shakily: "I tell you I'll shoot. . . . Uncle André. . . ."

Lecœur hardly knew to whom he handed the receiver. He dashed out of the room and up the stairs, almost breaking down the door of the room.

"Quick. . . . All cars to the Orient-Bar, Porte Clignancourt. . . ."

And without waiting to hear the message go out, he dashed back as fast as he'd come. At the door he stopped dead, struck by the calm that had suddenly descended on the room.

It was Saillard who held the receiver into which, in the thickest of Parisian dialects, a voice was saying:

"It's all right. . . . Don't worry. . . . I gave the chap a crack on the head with a bottle. . . . Laid him out properly. . . . God knows what he wanted to do to the kid. . . . What's that? . . . You want to speak to him? . . . Here, little one. . . . Come here. . . . And give me your popgun. . . . I don't like those toys. . . . Why! It isn't loaded! . . ."

Another voice. "Is that Uncle André?"

The Inspector looked round, and it was not to André, but to Olivier, to whom he handed the receiver.

"Uncle André. . . . I got him."

"Bib! It's me. . . ."

"What are you doing there, Dad?"

"Nothing. . . . Waiting to hear from you. . . . It's been . . ."

"You can't think how bucked I am. . . . Wait a moment. . . . Here's the police. They're just arriving."

Confused sounds. Voices, the shuffling of feet, the clink of glasses. Olivier Lecœur listened, standing there awkwardly, gazing at the wall-map which he did not see, his thoughts far away at the northern extremity of Paris, in a windswept boulevard.

"They're taking me with them. . . ."

Another voice.

"Is that you, Chief? . . . Janvier here. . . ."

One might have thought it was Olivier Lecœur who had been knocked on the head with a bottle by the way he held the receiver out, staring blankly in front of him.

"He's out, right out, Chief. They're lugging him away now. . . . When the boy heard the telephone ringing he decided it was his chance. He grabbed Loubet's gun from his pocket and made a dash for the 'phone. . . . The proprietor here's a pretty tough nut. . . . If it hadn't been for . . ."

A little lamp lit up in the plan of Paris.

"Hallo! . . . Your car's gone out? . . ."

"Someone's smashed the glass of the pillar telephone in the Place Clignancourt. . . . Says there's a row going on in a bar. . . . I'll ring up again when we know what's going on. . . ."

It wouldn't be necessary.

Nor was it necessary for André Lecœur to put a cross in his note-book under "Miscellaneous". . . .

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THE PROGNOSIS

by HOLLOWAY HORN

DR. PHILIP MALLISON-MEDHURST was the most dignified consultant in the most dignified house in Harley Street — which is the most dignified of all streets. He was a man of fifty, slim, fit, extremely well dressed, and with that subtle air of kindly authority which only the most successful medical men acquire. He was one of the greatest authorities in London on the human heart — that hollow, muscular organ the efficiency of which is so important to man's well-being.

Perhaps as a result of his profound knowledge of this organ he was a bachelor — anyway, his practice left him with little time for the more amusing side of life. Great and simple, cabinet ministers and chorus-girls, consulted him, and he treated them all with that assured confidence which few men and no women choose to question.

Marion Daviott, his receptionist, had been with him only a month or so, but she was already inclined to regard him as one of the greatest men in — or out — of Harley Street. It was she who made the appointment for Martin Pulsford, and she could not be blamed for assuming that it was his first consultation with the doctor. He rang up one evening just as she was about to leave.

"I should like to see Dr. Medhurst — preferably on this Wednesday."

Miss Daviott looked at her date book, and said, "Dr. Mallison-Medhurst can see you at three thirty on Wednesday or at four thirty on Friday."

"Wednesday, three thirty," Martin Pulsford said firmly.

He replaced the receiver and returned to the smoking-room of his club. He was a man of that vague age between thirty-five and fifty. His eyes were rather close together and lent an air almost of suspicion to his face. His mouth, moreover, was weak and hesitant. He was that comparatively rare person whose character is written in his face for all who care to see.

But he had, in addition, a sullen, resentful air as he returned to the chair he had left in order to ring up Dr. Mallison-Medhurst. One or two of his fellow-members glanced at him, but none spoke. He was not a popular member in the club, and for many months had been abroad. . . .

Ten minutes before the time of his appointment he was ushered into the waiting-room of that dignified house in Harley Street. There were half a dozen people already there, for several distinguished medical men had suites in the house.

The room was beautifully furnished and the prevailing tone a soft, restful green. But nothing would have soothed Martin Pulsford's mood.

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A few minutes after the half-hour the receptionist opened the door and murmured in her distant manner: "Mr. Martin Pulsford."

He followed her to the first floor and along a thickly-carpeted corridor to a large room at the back of the house.

Dr. Mallison-Medhurst rose as he entered the room: "How do you do?" he asked, rather absent-mindedly. "Will you sit here, please?"

"I am very well indeed, thank you," said Martin Pulsford, as he sat in the chair the doctor had indicated.

In the circumstances it was rather a curious reply to the doctor's conventional remark; moreover, there was an even more curious grating quality in Martin Pulsford's voice. The consultant glanced sharply at him.

"I've seen you before . . . surely?" he said, after a momentary silence.

"You have."

"I'm afraid I did not recognize your name. I see so many patients. And my secretary is a new one. Martin Pulsford" — the doctor had glanced at his diary — "no, I don't recall the name but your face remains in my memory — faces nearly always do. I'll look up your case."

Pulsford watched the doctor grimly as he picked out a card from a file index.

"You were here exactly twelve months ago today," the doctor said, in a rather surprised tone.

"Quite right! At four o'clock. It is now twenty minutes to four."

The doctor frowned as he glanced through the neatly-written data on the card.

"And how are you feeling?" he asked, not, perhaps, with quite his usual confidence.

Pulsford's suspicious eyes were on the doctor's face. "I saw Sir Barry Tomlin last week," he said. "He told me that with reasonable care I should live to be an old man."

"I am delighted. There is no man in London whose word carries greater weight than Sir Barry's."

"Yet a year ago today you told me I had not twelve months to live!"

The doctor was again examining the record of the case. "I remember the circumstances," he said quietly. "Not one case in ten thousand with your peculiar abnormality of the muscular walls of the heart lasts as long as the time I mentioned."

"So I'm the ten-thousandth case," Pulsford said in an unpleasant tone.

"In my experience — which I may claim is not inconsiderable — I know of no other case. I should like to examine you once again. I am quite certain that Sir Barry would have concurred in my opinion twelve months ago — that, indeed, every heart specialist in London would have done so."

"Your mistake meant ruin to me!"

"I am exceedingly distressed, of course. But, as I said, I remember the circumstances —"

"Distressed!" Martin Pulsford interrupted him rudely. "You," he went on, with a sudden change in his tone, "are not going to make any more mistakes and you're not going to be

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'distressed' for long." There was a strained, wild look in his eyes.

Dr. Mallison-Medhurst was not so much nervous as acutely uncomfortable. Gone was that air of confident authority, for he realized that he was dealing with a man whose mind was — temporarily, at least — unhinged. But when he spoke he did so with professional calm. "It is, I assure you, contrary to my general practice to make so definite a statement to a patient. You insisted on my telling you what I thought of your chances — you remember? And I'm quite certain that I made it perfectly clear that I was expressing an opinion, and an opinion only. If you had not specially asked for an explicit opinion I should most certainly not have given one. Obviously," the doctor went on, "I had nothing whatever to gain by giving such an opinion."

"Twelve months to live — at the outside — was what you said," Pulsford repeated as if he had not been listening. "I sold my business — at a knock-down price — I broke off my engagement and now the girl is married to another man. Do you hear that? She's married to another man! And I'm almost penniless!"

"It is most unfortunate. One thing is certain. Never, in any circumstances, will I ever make a positive statement of such a nature again," the consultant said with feeling. "No matter how much the patient may beg me to."

"You're quite right, Dr. Mallison-Medhurst — you won't."

He had produced an unpleasant little revolver. Now that his guard was down, the weakness and suspicion and general lack of balance in his face would have been clear to a far less penetrating intelligence than the doctor's.

"You mean to kill me?" Mallison-Medhurst asked, with apparent casualness. He was playing for time, wondering desperately how he could disarm his dangerous patient.

"I do. Funny, isn't it, to think that you will die before me, after all?"

"Life at best is uncertain," the doctor said easily. "Let's have a last cigarette together, shall we?"

"I don't smoke. You stopped me smoking — twelve months ago."

"I know. It's that part of my work I hate most — telling people they mustn't do this and mustn't do that. Smoking, particularly. Yet in many cardiac cases it is essential. My own heart isn't too good, for example, and I've recently had to cut out nearly all my smoking."

If only Miss Daviott would come in to distract the man's attention for a moment, but the bell was under the edge of the desk immediately in front of the patient and the doctor did not dare to ring it.

"You like your work — you know you do!" Pulsford snarled. "You like forbidding people to do things. Makes you feel like a god!"

"In a way, perhaps, but I don't often make mistakes as I did with you. And I've got very tired of it lately. I'm not at all sorry that you are going

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to shoot me." The doctor, with magnificent self-control, smiled at his menacing visitor.

The suspicion in the other's face changed to cunning. "Nobody wants to die!" he said. "You're treating me as if I were a child."

"You're quite right, nobody does," the doctor said, realizing that he had made a mistake in treating his patient as if he were wholly insane. "But there is a stage in which a man just doesn't mind. In your own case, of course, I made a bad mistake."

"You sentenced me to death."

"The responsibility of my job is too much for a man, Mr. Pulsford. That is what it boils down to; I'm tired."

"This is just talk — you're clever at talk," the patient said in a dangerously quiet tone. "You sentenced me to death, but I'm going to kill you. *I'm* not going to make a mistake."

"Who's that?" the doctor cried.

Pulsford followed his startled glance and in that second Dr. Mallison-Medhurst acted. He grabbed the man's wrist and with a quick deft movement jerked the revolver from his grasp. He was a bigger and a fitter man than the patient who, in spite of a few years' advantage in age, was no match for him. Pulsford attempted to rush for the revolver, but the doctor held him off, and pushed him, panting and exhausted, on to the chesterfield by the door.

The consultant was extremely sorry for his patient, but he carefully locked the revolver in his desk before he attended to him. He was holding a glass of water to his lips when Pulsford came round and the sudden blaze of insane hatred in his eyes horrified the doctor.

"You thought you'd trick me!" Pulsford said in a low tone. He grabbed a chair and turned on the doctor. There was murder in his face.

"Steady, old chap," the doctor said quietly, but Pulsford, gripping the chair, came towards him relentlessly. Mallison-Medhurst, fully aware of his danger, backed behind his desk.

"Steady," he said again, in an even more kindly tone, for Pulsford's face was grayish and his breathing labored.

Suddenly, however, the chair fell from his grasp. He stood a moment, swaying unsteadily, before he slumped in a heap on the silencing carpet.

The doctor touched the bell.

"The poor fellow's ill," he said, as Miss Daviott came in. They lifted him into a chair.

"He's dead!" she said, and did her best to speak with a professional lack of concern.

The doctor nodded. He was thinking. There was, he decided, no need to say anything about the revolver or the interview, even to Miss Daviott.

The silence of the room was broken by the muted tones of the clock on the landing just outside the door. It struck four o'clock.

Dr. Mallison-Medhurst had been right, after all.

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IMPOSSIBLE CRIME DEPT.: *The Three Widows*

by ELLERY QUEEN

TO THE normal palate the taste of murder is unpleasant. But Ellery is an epicure in these matters and certain of his cases, he deposes, possess a flavor which lingers on the tongue. Among these dangerous delicacies he places high "The Case of the Three Widows."

Two of the widows were sisters: Penelope, to whom money was nothing, and Lyra, to whom it was everything; consequently, each required large amounts of it. Both having buried thriftless husbands at an early age, they returned to the Murray Hill manse of their father with what everyone suspected was relief, for old Theodore Hood was generously provided with the coin of the Republic and he had always been indulgent with his daughters. Shortly after Penelope and Lyra repossessed their maiden beds, however, Theodore Hood took a second wife, a cathedral-like lady of great force of character. Alarmed, the sisters gave battle, which their stepmother grimly joined. Old Theodore, caught in their crossfire, yearned only for peace. Eventually he found it, leaving a household inhabited by widows exclusively.

One evening not long after their father's death Penelope the plump and Lyra the lean were summoned by a servant to the drawing-room of the Hood pile. They found waiting for them Mr. Strake, the family lawyer.

Mr. Strake's commonest utterance fell like a sentence from the lips of a judge; but tonight, when he pronounced, "Will you be seated, ladies?" his tone was so ominous that the crime was obviously a hanging one. The ladies exchanged glances and declined.

In a few moments the tall doors squealed into the Victorian walls and Sarah Hood came in feebly on the arm of Dr. Benedict, the family physician.

Mrs. Hood surveyed her stepdaughters with a sort of contempt, her head teetering a little. Then she said, "Dr. Benedict and Mr. Strake will speak their pieces, then I'll speak mine."

"Last week," began Dr. Benedict, "your stepmother came to my office for her semi-annual check-up. I gave her the usual thorough examination. Considering her age, I found her in extraordinarily good health. Yet the very next day she came down sick — for the first time, by the way, in eight years. I thought then that she'd picked up an intestinal virus, but

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Mrs. Hood made a rather different diagnosis. I considered it fantastic. However, she insisted that I make certain tests. I did, and she was right. She had been poisoned."

The plump cheeks of Penelope went slowly pink, and the lean cheeks of Lyra went slowly pale.

"I feel sure," Dr. Benedict went on, addressing a point precisely midway between the sisters, "that you'll understand why I must warn you that from now on I shall examine your stepmother every day."

"Mr. Strake," smiled old Mrs. Hood.

"Under your father's will," said Mr. Strake abruptly, also addressing the equidistant point, "each of you receives a small allowance from the income of the estate. The bulk of that income goes to your stepmother for as long as she shall live. But at Mrs. Hood's demise, you inherit the principal of some two million dollars, in equal shares. In other words, you two are the only persons in the world who will benefit from your stepmother's death. As I've informed both Mrs. Hood and Dr. Benedict, if there is a single repetition of this ghastly business I shall insist on calling in the police."

"Call them now!" cried Penelope.

Lyra said nothing.

"I could call them now, Penny," said Mrs. Hood with the same faint smile, "but you're both very clever and it might not settle anything. My strongest protection would be to throw the two of you out of this house; unfortunately, your father's will prevents me. Oh, I understand your impatience to be rid of me. You have luxurious tastes which aren't satisfied by my simple way of living. You'd both like to remarry, and with the money you could buy second husbands." The old lady leaned forward a little. "But I have bad news for you. My mother died at 99, my father at 103. Dr. Benedict tells me I can live another thirty years, and I have every intention of doing so." She struggled to her feet, still smiling. "In fact, I'm taking certain precautions to make sure of it," she said; and then she went out.

Exactly one week later Ellery was seated beside Mrs. Hood's great mahogany four-poster, under the anxious eyes of Dr. Benedict and Mr. Strake.

She had been poisoned again. Fortunately, Dr. Benedict had caught it in time.

Ellery bent over the old lady's face, which looked more like plaster than flesh. "These precautions of yours, Mrs. Hood —"

"I tell you," she whispered, "it was impossible."

"Still," said Ellery, "it was done. So let's resume. You had your bedroom windows barred and a new lock installed on that door, the single key to which you've kept on your person at all times. You've bought your own food. You've done your own cooking in this room and you've eaten here alone. Clearly, then, the poison could not have been introduced into your food before, during, or after its prep-

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aration. Further, you tell me you purchased new dishes, have kept them here, and you and you alone have been handling them. Consequently, the poison couldn't have been put on or in the cooking utensils, china, glassware, or cutlery involved in your meals. How then was the poison administered?"

"That's the problem," cried Dr. Benedict.

"A problem, Mr. Queen," muttered Mr. Strake, "that I thought — and Dr. Benedict agreed — was more your sort of thing than the police's."

"Well, my sort of thing is always simple," replied Ellery, "provided you see it. Mrs. Hood, I'm going to ask you a great many questions. Is it all right, Doctor?"

Dr. Benedict felt the old lady's pulse, and he nodded. Ellery began. She replied in whispers, but with great positiveness. She had bought a new tooth brush and fresh tooth paste for her siege. Her teeth were still her own. She had an aversion to medication and took no drugs or palliatives of any kind. She drank nothing but water. She did not smoke, eat sweets, chew gum, use cosmetics . . . The questions went on and on. Ellery asked every one he could think of, and then he shook up his brain to think of more.

Finally, he thanked Mrs. Hood, patted her hand, and went out with Dr. Benedict and Mr. Strake.

"What's your diagnosis, Mr. Queen?" asked Dr. Benedict.

"Your verdict," said Mr. Strake.

"Gentlemen," said Ellery, "when I eliminated her drinking water by examining the pipes and faucets in her bathroom and finding they hadn't been tampered with, I'd ruled out the last possibility."

"And yet it's being administered orally," snapped Dr. Benedict. "That's my finding and I've been careful to get medical corroboration."

"If that is a fact, Doctor," said Ellery, "then there is only one remaining explanation."

"What's that?"

"Mrs. Hood is poisoning herself. If I were you I would call in a psychiatrist. Good day!"

Ten days later Ellery was back in Sarah Hood's bedroom. The old lady was dead. She had succumbed to a third poisoning attack.

On being notified, Ellery had promptly said to his father, Inspector Queen, "Suicide."

But it was not suicide. The most painstaking investigation by police experts, utilizing all the resources of criminological science, failed to turn up a trace of the poison, or of a poison container or other possible source, in Mrs. Hood's bedroom or bath. Scoffing, Ellery went over the premises himself. His smile vanished. He found nothing to contradict either the old lady's previous testimony or the findings of the experts. He grilled the servants. He examined with remorseless efficiency Penelope, who kept weeping, and Lyra, who kept snarling. Finally, he left.

It was the kind of problem which

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Ellery's thinking apparatus, against all the protests of his body, cannot let alone. For forty-six hours he lived in his own head, fasting and sleepless, ceaselessly pacing the treadmill of the Queen apartment floor. In the forty-seventh hour Inspector Queen took him by the arm and put him to bed.

"I thought so," said the Inspector. "Over 101. What hurts, son?"

"My whole existence," mumbled Ellery; and he submitted to aspirins, an ice bag, and a rare steak broiled in butter.

In the middle of the steak he howled like a madman and clawed at the telephone.

"Mr. Strake? Ellery Queen! Meet me at the Hood house immediately! — yes, notify Dr. Benedict! — yes, now I know how Mrs. Hood was poisoned!"

CHALLENGE TO THE READER: *You now have all the facts. Pause and consider: How was Mrs. Hood poisoned?*

And when they were gathered in the cavern of the Hood drawing-room Ellery peered at plump Penelope and lean Lyra and he croaked: "Which one of you is intending to marry Dr. Benedict?"

And then he said, "Oh, yes, it has to be that. Only Penelope and Lyra benefit from their stepmother's murder, yet the only person who could physically have committed the murder is Dr. Benedict . . . Did you ask how, Doctor?" asked Ellery. "Why, very simply. Mrs. Hood experienced her first poisoning attack the day after her semi-annual medical check-up — by you, Doctor. And thereafter, you announced, *you would examine Mrs. Hood every day.* There is a classic preliminary to every physician's examination of a patient. I submit, Dr. Benedict," said Ellery with a smile, "that you introduced the poison into Mrs. Hood's mouth on the very thermometer with which you took her temperature."

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946

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THE NEW SHOE *by ARTHUR W. UPFIELD* (CRIME CLUB, $2.50)	"A . . . solid writer rather below his best . . ." (AB)	". . . human and well plotted . . ." (LGO)
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Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine rounds up the judgment of reviewers across the country. The key on the right gives sources.

"Colorful and carefully plotted." (HT)	". . . authentic Down Under scene and character." (DBH)	
"A smooth and entertaining picture of life on a London newspaper, and a good suspense story." (HT)	". . . psychology and detection brilliantly integrated; if there's a perfect story, this is it." (DBH)	
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". . . network of red-herrings and much ado about nothing." (HT)	"Confusing in spots — but wonderful cast of characters . . . delightful writing. Applause!" (KS)	
". . . quite the liveliest of the stories about Miss Silver that I have met." (JS)	"Miss Silver is always a pleasure-. . . but the-goings-on . . . get just a bit thick for credibility . . ." (KS)	
". . . drowned in a violence in which the author obviously takes . . . pleasure . . . a clutter of incident . . ." (JS)	". . . a private-eye yarn which is one of the few . . . rating high honors this year." (DBH)	
". . . first novel, but it has a finish and a rounded quality which suggest long experience." (HT)	". . . light-hearted but pertinent novel . . . primarily . . . a novel, not a copy of a mystery type." (DBH)	
". . . deserves credit as an interesting study in character." (HT)	"Little mystery but interesting and sometimes penetrating study of small town mores . . ." (KS)	

KEY TO REVIEW SOURCES

AB: *Anthony Boucher in The New York Times*

DBH: *Dorothy B. Hughes in The Los Angeles Daily News*

LGO: *Lenore Glen Offord in The San Francisco Chronicle*

KS: *Kathleen Sproul in The Saturday Review of Literature*

JS: *James Sandoe in The New York Herald Tribune*

HT: *Unsigned review in The New York Herald Tribune*

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As we pointed out once before, poets are peculiarly sensitive to the smell of evil, to the sound of violence, to the sight of cruelty, to the touch of tragedy, to the taste of murder — and to that sixth sense which detects and diagnoses "the heartache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to." Yes, there is a deep and ineradicable affinity between poetry and ratiocination . . .

So, it should not come as a complete surprise to realize that many of America's celebrated poets have also written short stories dealing with crime, detection, and mystery. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, for example — we plan to publish soon a tale of mystery by Longfellow, a tale of legendary quality. And, believe it or not, Walt Whitman wrote short stories of murder — one of them will appear in EQMM in the near future. Yes, the list is long and luminous — Eugene Field, Louise Imogen Guiney, Stephen Crane, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Stephen Vincent Benét, Conrad Aiken, Christopher Morley, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Mark Van Doren — all these distinguished poets have written prose on the theme of crime or detection.

Nor have our English brothers-of-the-blood, going all the way back to Chaucer, failed to see the dramatic and melodramatic possibilities of crime and detection. Thomas Hardy, Robert Louis Stevenson, Oscar Wilde, Rudyard Kipling, Richard Le Gallienne, Walter de la Mare, G. K. Chesterton, Lord Dunsany, A. A. Milne — these are only a few of the many noted British poets who have explored murder-as-a-fine-art in the short-story form.

Yes, you find tales of crime signed by the most unexpected author-names. It is so easy to forget — like not seeing the forest for the trees — that one of America's greatest literary geniuses, Edgar Allan Poe, is just as famous the world over for having created the modern detective story as he is for having written such immortal poems as "To Helen," "Annabel Lee," and "Ulalume" — and his fame for having invented the detective story will not perish from the earth . . .

Now, who would have dreamed that the man who wrote that phenomenally popular poem, "Trees," the man who was the son of a poet and the husband of a poet and whose literary aim was to combine "piety with mirth," the man who was killed while scouting for a machine-gun nest in World War I — that man, Joyce Kilmer, also wrote a tale of craven crime and blackguardly blackmail?

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WHITEMAIL

by JOYCE KILMER

SPIKE RITCHIE AND I WORKED TOgether on the *Daily News* from 1904 to 1907, and I always liked him. He was bright, hard-working, companionable and — I thought — perfectly straight. The other day he told me about a pretty crooked deal he was mixed up in. In fact, he told me that he was an unrepentant blackmailer and traitor. And I like him more than I ever did before.

When I got back to New York last week I looked over the pictures I had bought in Turkey and decided that I had the material for some Sunday stories. So I went around to the *News* office. The elevator man didn't know me — he had been on the job only two years — but he knew Spike.

"Mr. Ritchie is assistant Sunday editor now," he said. "But I don't think you'll find him in his office. Today's Thursday, so I guess he's in the composing room."

I made him let me off at the composing room and went in. There was Spike, telling the foreman that Matty had a glass arm, and making up the fashion page. He had grown much balder, but otherwise he had changed very little since I saw him six years before. He was the same little stoop-shouldered fellow, with the same rat-tail mustache, and apparently the same cigar butt fixed in the corner of his mouth. Also, I discovered in a few minutes, he had the same alcoholic breath.

"Hello, John!" he said. "Wait till I fix this up and I'll go out with you."

Soon we were comfortably seated at a table in Jimmy's bar. Jimmy, I was absurdly pleased to notice, remembered me and put a few drops of syrup in my Irish as if I were still a daily visitor. Spike looked at my pictures and told me to go ahead with the stories. Then — of course — we both grew reminiscent, and after the third drink and a little lunch came his confession. That is, if you'd call it a confession. . . . "You're not the only globe trotter," he said, lighting for the fourth time his amorphous cigar butt. "I went abroad two summers ago."

I expressed interest — without much enthusiasm, for I wanted to talk about Turkey.

"Yes," he said, "I had a little money saved up — I wasn't married then — and I was feeling pretty rotten, so I decided to knock off for a while. I traveled around the Continent for a few weeks and then I went to London. I wanted to see something of the country, so I bought a knapsack and made a leisurely walking tour of the Midland counties. The result of that walking tour was a

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mighty queer experience. And, in spite of the fact that you are bursting with the desire to tell me how you matched pennies with the Sultan and chucked the harem under its chin, I am now going to take up some minutes of the *News's* time in telling you about that experience. It has never been used as a news story, and it never will. But the villain — unless you call me the villain — is dead now, and I guess it wouldn't do any harm if you fixed it up with different names and made a fiction story out of it. Then if you sell it you can split with me fifty-fifty."

"Go ahead," I said.

"Well [began Spike], I struck a little bit of a market town called Ashbourne that I liked pretty well. So I got a room at an inn entertainingly called *The Green Man and Black's Head* and settled down for a week's stay. There were very few other guests, so the proprietor and I got rather friendly. Of course, like all Englishmen, he was surprised that I didn't know his cousin who was on a ranch in Texas and his nephew who was manager of a grocery store in Milwaukee.

"'There's one of your fellow-countrymen I can't say that I care for,' he said one evening. 'There was a Mr. James Rodney who came here from New York City, and we all wish we'd never seen him, sir. Perhaps you know him — he's a tall, thin gentleman with a sort of a mole over his right eye. He told us that he owned a big flour mill, but I don't know as he told the truth. Do you know a man of that name?'

"I told him that I had never before heard of James Rodney, and by asking a few questions I heard a story that was unpleasant though not particularly strange. Two summers before, an American calling himself James Rodney had come to Ashbourne and stopped with Mrs. Clarke, the widow of the old vicar. She had very little money, and made a living by taking lodgers. He was on his way up north, and he had a two hours' wait between trains in Ashbourne. He took a walk through the town, stopped to get a drink of water at Mrs. Clarke's house, found that she took lodgers, and by that night he had given up all idea of going north. He said that he liked Ashbourne and the Clarke cottage but, said the innkeeper, 'what really attracted him was Mary Clarke. She was an amazingly pretty girl in those days, sir; in fact, she is still, though she's had a hard time.'

"It did not take Rodney long to make Mrs. Clarke and Mary believe that he was a person of some importance in New York. He seemed to have plenty of money, his manners were those of a gentleman, and he became popular in local society. In fact, everyone was pleased when, after a tempestuous courtship, Mary and he were married in the beautiful old parish church.

"Mary thought that her husband would take her to America at once, but he said that he would prefer to see a little more of Europe. So they went

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to Switzerland for a couple of weeks and then returned to Mrs. Clarke's cottage. Rodney had received a cable from New York, he said. He must go back to his mill for a little while. It was an urgent matter — he must get the boat sailing from Liverpool on the very next day. He would send a letter by every mail and within a month he would come back for his wife and her mother.

"Of course you have guessed what happened. James Rodney, or whatever his real name was, never came back. He did not write and, what is more important, he did not send any money. Letters sent to James Rodney, the Rodney Flour and Grain Company, 13 West 98th Street, New York City, U. S. A., were returned. His name did not appear on the passenger list of the steamer on which he said he intended to sail. For a while Mrs. Clarke and Mary thought that he had met with some fatal accident, but after a friend of theirs, visiting America, had found that no such concern as the Rodney Flour and Grain Company had ever existed and that there were no mills on 98th Street, they knew that they had been cruelly deceived. In the course of time Mary had a baby, a very nice baby. It was a little boy, as pretty as Mary herself and resembling her strikingly. In only one respect he resembled his father — there was a small but unmistakable mole over his right eye.

"This story interested me very much, and I took the liberty of calling on Mrs. Clarke the next day, on the pretense of looking for lodgings. Indeed, it became more than a pretext, for Mrs. Clarke was such a charming old gentlewoman and the cottage and Mary — it was hard for me to call her Mrs. Rodney — so attractive that I took a room and stayed for three weeks.

"Of course I got from them all that they knew about the mysterious James Rodney, and that was little more than the innkeeper had told me. But just before I left Mrs. Rodney gave me a little kodak picture of her husband and herself, taken by her mother on the porch of the cottage.

"I went back to America with a fixed determination to find this Rodney person, smash his face, and make him send every cent that he possessed back to Ashbourne. You see, I knew the suffering that his little game had inflicted on Mary and her mother and I was pretty angry about it. I confess I didn't have much hope of finding the fellow, but I was going to make a good try at it, anyway. Well, I didn't have to try very hard. I never was much good at this suspense business, so I'll spring my sensation on you right away. James Rodney was Andrew Judd. Yes — don't spill your whisky — Andrew Judd, president of the Judd Iron Works, philanthropist and reformer.

"Two days after I got back, Boss Ridder sent me out to interview Judd for the Sunday edition. Judd had just invented a very fancy sort of model tenement with a gymnasium and swimming tank on every floor. In or-

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der to understand just what improvements were needed in the housing of the poor he had spent two days in a tenement house on the lower East Side, and was very eager to talk about it. As soon as I saw him I recognized him, and you can readily understand that my first desire was for a large encouraging draught of the beverage known as whisky. And, by the way, ring that bell, will you? Jimmy, two more of the same.

"Well, of course I thought right away just what you thought — here is one scoop of a story! In spite of the fact that we were running this page interview in the Sunday, the *News* had no particular friendship for Judd. In fact, we were going to oppose him in the Fall, when he was going to run for Mayor.

"I had all the facts and there was plenty of time to get the story in next morning's paper. All I had to do was to flash that little kodak picture (which I always carried with me) on Judd, tell him what I knew of his little European jaunt and let him throw me out of the office. Then back to the *News*, to grab all the space I wanted for the biggest sensation that the paper ever had. Think what a story like that would mean to me, an absolutely exclusive story with a picture to prove it! I saw myself getting a whopping bonus and a regular job to boot. Then, too, you know that I'm not talking sentiment when I say that I was — have always been — loyal to the *News*. You were long enough in the game to find out what a newspaperman's loyalty is — how his first idea when anything big happens is always to hammer it out on his machine and get it in before the first edition goes to press.

"But I had sense enough to hold on to myself for a while. I shook hands with Judd — I guess I stared pretty hard at that mole over his right eye — and I went ahead with the interview as had been arranged. Judd was feeling expansive that day, and he really knew how to talk. He gave me a great little story, full of human interest, and with a lot of new stuff in it, but all the while I was listening to him I was thinking harder than I ever thought before. There were three different plans in my mind — I couldn't, to save my life, think just what I ought to do. After a while Judd felt that he'd given me all I needed and he stopped talking.

"'Mr. Judd,' I said, almost involuntarily, 'when were you married?'

"'Why, my dear boy, I don't see what that has to do with what we've been talking about; but I was married five years ago. In St. Marmaduke's Church, of which I am junior warden, if you wish the full particulars. My wife was Miss Emily Lindsay, and here is a picture of her.'

"He took from his desk a framed photograph of a very lovely woman with a little girl on her lap.

"'I see,' I said vaguely. 'And when was it that you went abroad?'

"'Well, I really don't think that the public will be interested in matters like this,' he said, 'but I have

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been abroad several times. Two years ago I spent the summer in England, and then made a somewhat extensive tour of Germany. But I think that I must ask you to excuse me now. I've given you all you need, have I not? Oh, yes!' he added. 'I suppose you will want a picture of me. I think I have some in my desk drawer. I'll look and see.'

" 'No,' I said, in a voice which seemed strange to me. 'I've got a picture already.'

"His back was turned to me, and he was rummaging in his desk. 'But I'm afraid that's been used before. I think I can find some new ones for you.'

" 'This picture has never been used before,' I said. 'It was taken two years ago in Ashbourne.'

"At the word 'Ashbourne' he turned suddenly and looked at the little square of gray cardboard in my hands. Then he grew very white and stood perfectly still.

"For a minute neither of us spoke.

"Then, with a self-control for which I could not help admiring him, he pushed his chair to the desk, sat down, turned his back to me and wrote.

"I heard the rip of torn paper. He whirled his chair and stretched out his hands to me. In his left hand was an oblong of green paper with his name written in the lower right-hand corner. His right hand was empty.

" 'Here is a blank check, which I have signed,' he said. 'Give me the photograph, please.'

"I admit I hesitated for a moment. I am not so devoted to my job that I would hate an independent fortune. But I didn't hesitate long.

"It was a ridiculously theatrical thing to do, but I took the check, tore it into four pieces, and dropped them on the blotter on his desk.

" 'To hell with your check!' I said, in a quiet conversational tone of voice. 'You'll need that money when you start defending yourself against the charge of bigamy.'

"Judd deliberately lit a cigar and sat looking at me.

" 'So, you've got an interesting item for tomorrow's paper, have you?' he said. 'But what's the idea? Just what do you gain by attacking me? That little picture is interesting, but it proves absolutely nothing.'

"I rose to go. 'In the first place,' I said, with my hand on the doorknob, 'I know the girl whom you illegally married two years ago, and the *News* will bring her over here — with her child. We will gain two things — we will be purveyors of a very interesting story and we will bring punishment on a damned hypocrite.'

"He was perfectly calm. 'I see your first point,' he answered reflectively. 'You can publish a very sensational story — there is no doubt of that. But I doubt very much your ability to substantiate your charge, and I fail to see why you are so bitterly enraged at me. There must be some motive. . . . I think I see. Yes, I think I see. But what earthly good will it do the young woman to drag her name into this scandal? You cannot carry

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out your amiable design of ruining me without also ruining two women.'

" 'All right,' I said, 'I'll tell you what I'll do. You've got to square yourself, and I'll keep quiet about this business.'

" 'Just what do you mean by "square myself"?' he said.

" 'James Rodney must die.'

" 'My God!' he exclaimed. 'Do you want me to kill myself?'

" 'You must kill James Rodney,' I said. 'See here, Mary Clarke has never heard of Andrew Judd. What you've got to do is write her a letter signing your own name, saying that James Rodney was Tom Smith, or John Jones, or anything you like. Anyway, you must say that he was a friend of yours and that he is dead. Say that he confessed to you on his deathbed that he had married and deserted a girl named Mary Clarke in Ashbourne, England, and that he asked you to notify her of his death and to send her all his money.'

" 'I'll do it,' he said. 'I'll do it this afternoon. I'll send her ten thousand dollars — fifty thousand dollars — all the money you say.'

" 'You certainly will do it today,' I said, 'for I'm going to stick around and watch you do it. You will write the letter at my dictation and I will mail it myself. But as to the money that you are sending, you've got the wrong idea. You will send Miss Clarke enough money to buy that little cottage so that they won't have to earn the rent by taking lodgers and enough to pay for a trip abroad for her and her mother. They need a little holiday after the trouble you got them into. Then you must add enough to send your son through school and through the university. I guess we'll put it at twenty thousand dollars — that's letting you off pretty cheap, and I don't want to burden them with a lot of your dirty money.'

" 'I suppose you know,' Mr. Judd said to me, 'that what you are doing is blackmail.'

" 'Today,' I answered, 'I am, in suppressing this story, breaking the commandment of the newspaper business — violating a code of ethics which you could not possibly understand. I am a traitor to the *News* and to my profession. And after that I don't mind a little blackmail.' "

Jimmy had taken away our empty glasses and was ostentatiously wiping the table with a gray napkin. Spike looked at his watch and got up to go. As we walked down the street I turned to him and said: "But didn't Mary What-you-may-call-her ever get wise? When Judd died last year she must have seen his picture in some English paper and known that he was the fellow that fooled her. I should think she'd sue his estate and get good money."

"Sure she got wise," said Spike. "But she wouldn't start anything now. She's perfectly comfortable, I guess."

"What is she doing?" I asked.

"Why," said Spike, lighting his cigar butt for the ninth time, "she's married to the assistant Sunday editor of the *Daily News*."

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Selwyn Jepson, author of OUTRUN THE CONSTABLE *which appeared in the movies as "Stage Fright," starring Marlene Dietrich and Jane Wyman, and directed by Alfred Hitchcock, has a definite 'tec philosophy, and he practises what he believes. There should be, Mr. Jepson has said, as little mystery in a story as possible — he much prefers to be told. Here-is-the-crime and here-is-who-done-it — now watch! Thus, Mr. Jepson allies himself with the proponents of the "inverted" detective story, although as a practitioner of this 'tec type, Mr. Jepson is interested more in the "adventurousness" of the tale than in the solution, direct or indirect, of the problem. But not "adventurousness" alone: the chase, the ruses, the ultimate capture must concern themselves with characters who seem like real people. The excitement, therefore, is not primarily in the physical action, but in the fact that the running and dodging and evading happen to completely believable human beings; the suspense is valid not because of the events themselves, but because the events occur in the tangled lives of credible people. "One set of story mechanics," Mr. Jepson maintains, "is very much like another; but the variation in the kind of human beings you can write about is infinite."*

Selwyn Jepson's "By the Sword" has no outrunning of the constable in the chase sense — all the running, all the attempts to escape the police, are essentially in the murderer's mind; but the story illustrates the author's basic 'tec technique — with variations.

BY THE SWORD

by SELWYN JEPSON

ALFRED CAITHNESS STAYED ON FOR Christmas for two reasons, quite apart from the cold weather, which he found easier to support at Dingle House than alone in his Baker Street flat. Snow had fallen heavily in the middle of the month and again on Christmas Day. It lay thickly now, with the thermometer showing four degrees of frost, and it hid the lawns of the Dingle gardens and coated the roofs and gables of the old house like icing on a cake.

Although he told himself that the reasons he had stayed were because an old-fashioned Christmas appealed to him and also because his cousin Herbert would undoubtedly lend him two thousand pounds if he handled him right, there was another thing which kept him here.

This, however, he had not yet fully

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admitted to himself. He only knew that he was in no great hurry to talk to Herbert about the money.

Life was very pleasant at Dingle House, he reflected. Why go out of the way to speed one's own departure?

This morning he sat by the blazing logs in the great stone fireplace of the library and watched Barbara, who was his cousin's wife, sewing at some pink thing.

The boy, young Robert, who was five and a bit, was marching a regiment of tin soldiers up and down the low, broad window-sill behind her. Every now and then Barbara would turn her head to smile at him and admire some new arrangement of their ranks. Lifeguards on horseback they were, with red coats and silver breast-plates, a gay company.

"You couldn't have given him anything he would have liked better, Alfred," she said. "It's the Caithness in him."

He nodded, but was more attentive to the graceful poise of her head on the white column of her neck.

"He'll be a soldier like the rest of them," she added, and sighed.

Her husband was not one, but only because his left leg was two inches shorter than his right, a childhood accident. Alfred, too, was an exception to the family tradition.

"I never cottoned to the idea," he remarked, following her thought, "but not because the old story frightened me."

"You mean that a Caithness always dies by the sword?"

She had been thinking of it a moment before, when she had seen Robert grown to a man and pursuing the career which his ancestors had fulfilled so gloriously.

"It's very queer, though," Alfred said, "how many of them have been killed that way."

He glanced at the crest carved in the limestone of the mantelpiece — a short sword gripped in a mailed hand.

"But in these days soldiering isn't so fashionable," he added. "Perhaps your boy will be a legal luminary like his famous father."

His eyes went back to her, to the helmet of sleek, fair hair.

How sorry he was for her! Married to Herbert, who was twenty-eight years her senior. A lame, dry-voiced man, consciously enigmatical, proud of his keen logical brain, his freedom from sentiment, and the cloying dangers of emotionalism. In other words, the Honorable Mr. Justice Caithness, whose judgments in the criminal court were renowned for the clarity of their law and the severity of their consequences.

Small wonder his life was so often threatened! To hear the smug self-righteousness of the man's voice as he condemned some poor devil to penal servitude was enough to arouse any vengeance. If he had had one threatening letter since the last sessions, he must have had a dozen.

Alfred shifted restlessly in his armchair and banged the dottle out of his pipe against the hearth.

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What joy could Barbara get out of a husband like that? Precious little. Where was he now, for that matter? Shut away in his study at the other end of the house with his dictionaries, encyclopedias and books of reference, striving to solve Torquemada's cross-word puzzle by Wednesday night! That was his weekly excitement, his one relaxation from the administration of justice and the text-book, *Anomalies in Criminal Law*, which he was preparing with young Donaldson's help. (At the thought of Jim Donaldson, Alfred frowned.)

"Left — right — left — right — left!" sang Robert at the window.

"Barbara!" said Alfred, and stopped abruptly.

She looked up and then dropped her eyes quickly.

"They are horsemen, dear," she explained, turning to the boy. "Only foot-soldiers march in step."

"These are diff'rent."

Alfred knew suddenly why he had stayed at Dingle House for Christmas. He went over to Robert and asked him to run along. The boy did not want to. A little disgruntled, he obeyed.

"I'll find the book of engines for Uncle Jim. An' I'll come back presently," he said at the door.

Alfred closed it on him and crossed to the chair in which the golden head was bent over the silk. She had not commented on his sending the child away and he took heart. Surely she guessed what was coming?

"I've been here ten days now," he said, searching for words, "and I've seen how things are — with you and Herbert."

"Alfred, please ——"

But he hurried on.

"You can't go on with it! You can't! You're sacrificing your life to an existence in which there is nothing but the dry dust of — of senility to warm your heart. He married you when you were too young to know anything about life. I saw it — I knew you in those days, remember. Your self-seeking, ambitious mother pushed you into his arms when you were little more than a child, because he was a rich and eminent man. Barbara, you are miserably unhappy, tortured, tied to a complacent fossil of a human being who has no more idea of love than — than that piece of wood!"

She had risen and was facing him with harassed eyes. He strode round the chair and tried to take her hands, but she snatched them behind her.

"Look at it honestly, Barbara! You know I'm stating no more than the truth of the thing. I've got eyes in my head. I've seen you looking at him, heard your silence when he says something particularly inane. You're rushing into disaster. Presently you'll begin to look for an escape and, because the desire is so urgent, your judgment will be faulty. You'll make a ghastly mistake. Some casual man will take advantage of your misery ——"

"Alfred, stop!"

"I won't stop. You've got to listen

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to me. I've loved you from the moment I first saw you, in that church at Herbert's side. Loved you, Barbara, d'you hear? I have the right to talk to you like this — to take you away."

She stared at him with her hands to her cheeks, as though she could not believe what she heard.

"You must come away with me — you and the boy. You won't have to give him up. I wouldn't ask that. I can't take you to a luxurious home but I can give you the warmer things of life, of the heart. Listen, Barbara. You know how I have felt about you for a long time. Last summer when I was here, do you remember the harvesting, when we rode home in the dusk on the top of that great mound of hay? You guessed then, didn't you, my darling? I held back because I wasn't sure of you, because I hadn't realized quite how terribly unhappy you were. You put up a fine show and it deceived me. But this last week has been different. You haven't succeeded for a second in making me think you care at all for Herbert. How could you pretend? He ——"

She shivered and broke into the spate of his sentences with low, broken phrases.

"Even if I don't care for him — even if I don't — does that give you the right to . . . Alfred, he's my husband — and your cousin. I — I am loyal to him and you must be."

"Heaven!" he cried. "What does *he* matter beside you? It's *your* life — all the years of life and adventure and *being* — in front of you that count!"

"You don't understand ——"

Then the door-handle creaked and he stopped, drew away. Jim Donaldson came in, his broad figure filling the doorway and his wide-set blue eyes cheerfully alert.

"Oh, hullo," he said, and strolled into the room. If he saw Alfred's scowl he ignored it. If he noticed the white, strained face of Barbara Caithness, he showed no sign.

"Cigarettes about?" he asked and stretched his shoulders, for he had been writing solidly since ten. Alfred disliked him cordially. The crispness of his speech, the health and honesty of his eyes, were irritating. This was the sort of man he saw as a danger to Barbara, living under the same roof with her when she was in this state of mind.

He saw the effort with which she picked up her sewing and made pretense of an easy mind. It was the gallant spirit he so admired in her, that, and all the perfection of form and feature which was hers. A woman in a million . . . his woman. Thank heaven he had had the courage to tell her so. It had startled her a bit but in a little she would see the thing more clearly. Blast this fellow Donaldson! Couldn't the oaf see they wanted to talk to each other? He watched him take possession of an armchair.

"No sign of the thermometer letting up. But it's going to stay bright, thank goodness."

But he wasn't as dull as he seemed.

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Alfred saw his quick glance at the girl. She wasn't giving anything away, though.

Donaldson, who could not be told to "run along," looked as though he proposed to sit there until lunch-time.

The boy returned at this point, burdened with a picture book and determined to engage Uncle Jim's attention. The library seemed crowded and Alfred left it in ill-humor. He wanted to think. The situation had developed almost by itself. He did not find himself surprised now that it had come at last and he had put words to it, but he was aware of a kind of breathlessness. Emotion, of course, and largely a physical one. He was quite experienced enough to realize that.

He went through the lounge toward the wide stairs.

As his footsteps died away, Donaldson sat up straight in his chair, all his carelessness gone. In its place were anxiety and concern.

"It has come, has it?"

"I'm frightened of him, Jim. I tried to stop him ——"

"— but he ranted on. I know. Why didn't I arrive a bit earlier? Had it been going on long?"

Her distress cut his heart.

"No. But he said dreadful things about — Herbert. He blamed him."

"He would. He's jealous, you see, of all that Herbert has which he hasn't. Money — success — fame. That's why he wants you. To have you, to steal you — make you follow him — would convince him of his own power. Power he knows in his heart of hearts, he can never achieve. But you needn't worry. You mustn't! Just yell for me if he starts again."

"It's difficult, Jim. You see, he knows. I don't mean about you and me, but about my not being happy."

He went to her and touched her hand, while Robert, realizing with the infallible instinct of his age that his elders were more interested in themselves than in him, went back to his Lifeguards on the window-sill.

Donaldson spoke softly.

"Was it only yesterday we discovered one another? I'm still a little dazed but I'm beginning to think straight. My dear, I shall have to tell Herbert, and go. It's the only thing to do. I'll tell him soon. Tomorrow. I shan't involve you. He'll be fair. You know, sometimes I think he knows already — and understands. That he knew before I myself did. He's odd in that way. More intuitive and sympathetic than people realize."

She nodded slowly, and her eyes shone mistily as she looked at him.

"Beloved," he said, "I shall carry you in my heart to the end of my days."

They lunched, the four of them, at the refectory table in the dining-room. A pewter bowl of holly in the middle partially hid husband and wife from one another, and Donaldson from Alfred. But Jim had no need to see Alfred's face to sense his triumph. He realized that the man's conceit, born of unconscious inferi-

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ority, would never permit him to see that Barbara, far from being pleased by his declaration, had indeed been nauseated and frightened by it.

She had always vaguely despised Alfred, not necessarily because he seemed constitutionally unable to keep any job more than three months, but because it was never, by the remotest chance, his fault that he lost it. "I told 'em to go to blazes," or, "I've got my principles and when a firm does *that* sort of thing — well, I leave them to it." Then, complaining bitterly that the gods seemed to have picked on him as their perpetual scapegoat, he would "borrow" some more money from Herbert to carry on with until something turned up.

Sometimes, too, he had said things about women, which in a queer way made one squirm. But for a certain charm, an indefinable quality, which made him an excellent companion when the mood was upon him, she could have hated him thoroughly. She was near to it now. He was complicating things for her at a difficult moment in her life. She was glad Jim was going to confess to Herbert. She would like to be there and face it with him. She loved, and was neither ashamed nor afraid. But Jim was right. He must leave her.

Lunch came to an end and she went up to her room to lie down and escape Alfred. Jim set off for a tramp across the Downs, taking the spaniels. He wanted to think out the future and nerve himself for the ordeal of saying goodbye to Barbara.

Alfred was also of a mind to consider the future, and the practical aspect of the money shortage, in view of his decision to take Barbara away, now became very clear to him. He must settle it as soon as possible. With the thought of Barbara strengthening his resolve, he followed the limping Herbert from the lunch table to the study.

He accepted a cigar and hoped, he said, that he wasn't in the way.

"How's the book going?"

"Very well, Alfred. Donaldson's help is invaluable. An exceedingly astute brain for such a young man. His knowledge of jurisprudence is remarkable. He'll make a great name for himself when he begins practising in earnest. Like few men with large private incomes, he is ambitious. He will be Attorney-General before he has finished."

"Lucky devil," Alfred commented. "I wish I had had a quarter of his chances. I'm only a couple of years older than he is and, if things had been a bit different — gone better for me — I would be doing as well."

Herbert put on a pair of spectacles and turned over a page in a dictionary.

"You indeed seem to have been unfortunate," he said.

Alfred nodded and glanced at his cousin. The keen, straight face was not unsympathetic. This seemed to be the moment.

"I've been on the wrong tack, that's the whole trouble," he went on. "I've always been doing things for other people instead of for myself.

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Look at that Sugar Beet Exploitation business! Why, in six weeks I'd put the thing on its feet! I suppose I did more to start that company off than anybody else in it. It must have made a profit of a hundred thousand this year. You see if I'm not right when they publish the balance sheet next month! And I would have been on the board but for Murgatroyd. I made a friend of the man and he started some ridiculous gossip about a row I had had in Coventry with the Invicto crowd. He had got it all wrong, of course, but that didn't prevent people listening to him. It got round to me in time, thank goodness. I called him a scandal-mongering liar to his face and walked out. They tried to get me back, of course, but I wouldn't go.

"No, the whole secret of it is that I ought to be my own boss. Herbert, I've got the idea of a lifetime. An export agency business. A one-man business. New markets will be opening up every day and there's scarcely a firm or organization in this country ready to put home manufacturers in touch with the fresh fields. I could do it and ship their stuff for them on a commission basis. There's a fortune in it!"

"It sounds quite an idea," said Herbert.

"Lord, I should think it is! But the devil of it is, it will cost money to get it going."

"These things do."

"At least a couple of thousand pounds."

"Yes?"

"Of course I shall be able to pay it back out of profits in a year — two years."

Herbert nodded, closed the dictionary, and inspected his cigar.

"I'm afraid I shan't be able to help you very much," he said.

Alfred's eyes moved uneasily. Well, perhaps two thousand was rather a lot all at once.

"I might manage it with fifteen hundred ——" he leaned forward. "It's a great opportunity from the investment point of view. At a most conservative estimate, the man who puts up the capital would see twenty or twenty-five per cent return per annum. I've worked it out, you see."

Herbert was silent.

"You said yourself that the idea was a good one," Alfred pointed out. "Frankly, Herbert, I was counting on you to see the ——"

Herbert had taken a small notebook out of a drawer in his desk and Alfred paused uncertainly. What was the fool doing now?

"In the last eight years, Alfred," he heard him saying, in a quiet, unemotional tone, "I have lent you six thousand pounds. I say 'lent,' because on each occasion that you have appealed to me you have spoken of repayment. I do not for a moment suggest that you have deliberately borrowed from me without intention of paying me back, but neither do I pretend to you that I regard these sums as anything but gifts. Indeed, they appear in this record under the

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heading of *Monies Given to A.C.* I have been very glad to help you and I am making no criticism. But, if I am not mistaken, I made a point of telling you when we discussed the matter on the fifteenth of July last that I would be unable to continue these — ah — loans."

"Yes, but Herbert, this is ——"

"Different, I think you wish to say? I am sorry, but I am unable to detect in this any intrinsic variation from your previous applications. I regret it exceedingly, Alfred, but, quite definitely and finally, no! I feel, and have felt for some while, that if you are ever to be successful it must be based on your own, unaided efforts. To continue to give you money — I put it bluntly, I am afraid — can only serve to postpone your chance of doing something worthwhile."

"All right," Alfred interrupted. "I quite understand. We'll say no more about it. As to the six thousand I've already had, I said I would repay it and I will."

His voice was quiet. It surprised and had an effect on his cousin, who seemed a little less sure of himself, almost as though he doubted momentarily the wisdom of his course. But his mouth tightened and Alfred, watching him narrowly, knew all hope had gone.

He rose and put half an inch of cigar ash carefully in the ashtray on the edge of the desk.

"You're a stubborn old thing, Herbert, but don't worry your head about me. I'll manage, I daresay."

He went out, and closed the door.

He did not immediately proceed on his way, however, but stood tensely in the corridor fighting the weakness which attacked his limbs. He told himself that he was calm, unperturbed by the catastrophe of that blank refusal. He should have foreseen its suddenness and now remain untroubled by its significance. Laugh! Show that you don't care!

But he whispered a little thickly: "Turned down! The swine turned me down!"

He walked unsteadily along the corridor with his mind confused by a swirl of thoughts. Barbara . . . the money . . . Herbert's stern face, with its eyes full of comprehension hovering in front of him.

His fingers closed tightly. Herbert had everything, hadn't he? All the money. The fate of men in his hands. The fate of Alfred Caithness, also. Even of Barbara. And by what right? The pale limping devil!

Then, before he reached the end of the corridor, an idea came which banished the shadows of uncertainty as with a bright light.

He stopped and became quite still, holding his breath as though he feared some eavesdropper of his mind.

He would kill Herbert. The money would come to Barbara.

Kill him, but not in this passion of hatred which possessed him now. Kill him quietly, unseen. Kill him in the night, secretly, so that no one could tell by whose hand he had died. The life of the Honorable Mr. Justice

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Caithness had been threatened by many men who believed that he might have punished their sins less savagely. There had been comments in the Press about it and, a little while ago, after the Glastonbury blackmail case, a police guard had been put to watch over him until the fuss quietened down.

The money would come to Barbara.

As the thought took shape and became decision, he realized that only through the death of this man would his own life, so long buried in a morass of inhibition and failure, grow and blossom to fruitfulness.

Barbara, free at last, could come openly to his arms after a little while.

Thank Heaven he had not quarreled with Herbert just now! Some blessed instinct must have warned him. An omen of success.

He began to think, to plan, and found himself curiously clear-headed and tranquil. The impatience was there and the need to give expression to this dominant desire which had been born in him. But these, far from hampering him, stimulated and enlivened his imagination.

He lay down on the divan in the library and closed his eyes.

First and foremost, he must school himself to appear normal when the others appeared. He must keep from his eyes and voice the excitement of his heart. There must be nothing they could remember afterwards.

Next, it must be a simple crime. The act of a man who is seeking vengeance without much thought for the consequences. An unsubtle, rather brutal murder. . . .

His glance fell on the long Elizabethan dagger hanging with other antique arms on the wall between the windows. He did not get up and inspect it more closely, but he remembered handling it idly years ago. A weighty, dangerous weapon.

It would come readily to the hand of anyone who climbed in by one of the windows. These were very low to the ground. He saw the carpet of snow stretching across the tennis lawn to the drive and the London road. The road itself had been cleared, it threaded like a black ribbon between the white hills.

He drew a sudden deep breath, like a swimmer who comes out of the heavy waves into smooth water.

At tea he was quiet. This suited both his mood and his tactics. Barbara would expect him to be on tenterhooks because of his declaration this morning. Herbert, knowing him to be disappointed about the money, would not look to him for any great display of cheerfulness. He noticed that Donaldson was rather silent, but that was no more than reasonable in a man who had walked nearly ten miles since lunch.

Barbara talked of little things, but with an effort. Alfred thought he knew why and was wrong. Only Donaldson knew.

Herbert was the only one of them who seemed to be in an entirely normal frame of mind. He was amiable and discursive. He was glad Alfred

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had decided to be philosophical. There was no reason why he should not pull himself together and make good.

Dusk had fallen before five. By half-past it was almost dark.

At a quarter to seven the dressing-gong sounded and Alfred, once again in the library, heard the others go to their rooms. He had several minutes in which to work. With a little hurrying he could do what he had to do and be changed and in the drawing-room before the rest.

He went swiftly to the window he had chosen and, opening it, stepped carefully out into the snow. The closed curtains would hide him from the eyes of an unlikely invader of the room. He stood for a moment in the darkness and then ran silently in the yielding snow, covering the fifty yards across the lawn and down the drive to the road in less than half a minute. He then turned and *walked* back to the window, taking a slightly indirect route.

His reasoning was sound. The traces of a murderer who had come from outside would appear clearly in the snow between the road and the house, but not on the road, which was clear. Furthermore, they would indicate that he had cautiously approached the scene of his intended crime and, having committed it, had fled quickly.

In preparing this evidence he was at pains to make sure that the two sets of tracks did not intersect. Were they to do so, it might betray the fact that the running ones had been made before the walking ones. He was taking no chances. That the road was free from snow was a godsend. A car could have stood there, its wheel-marks lost in those of previous and later traffic, while the man was about his job. And, since the footprints passed in and out of the snow at nearly the same spot on the edge of the road, obviously, the detectives would say, a car had been used.

He regained the window, parted the curtains stealthily, and stepped across the sill into the room. He closed the window and wiped what little frozen snow there was from the edges and soles of his boots, using a handkerchief which he dropped into the red heart of the fire as he passed it on his way to the door.

They were not his boots, but an old pair at least two sizes larger than his own which he had come upon some nights ago, when he was looking for an extra blanket, at the bottom of a cupboard on the landing outside his bedroom.

He reached his room unseen and, while the boots were drying on the radiator, changed quickly into his dinner jacket. On the way down to the drawing-room he returned them unobserved to their place, confident that they would never be connected with the tracks in the snow and that, even if by some incredible chance they were, there would be no evidence to show that he had ever worn them.

He was reading in the drawing-room when the others came down. Donaldson was more himself and Herbert mellower than his wont. If Bar-

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bara was pale, the two younger men had their own and different explanations for it. Herbert, who seldom if ever betrayed his observation, seemed, however, not to have noticed it. He went to his study after dinner, but reappeared within a few minutes in the drawing-room and suggested bridge.

It was a welcome suggestion and enabled those who heard it to get through what threatened for each of them to be a difficult evening.

The game came to an end after the fifth rubber at about half-past ten, with Alfred the only winner, twenty-seven shillings to the good.

"Luck seems to be in," he said. A few minutes later he asked Barbara to excuse him and bade them good night.

Herbert nodded very amiably to him as he went and Alfred interpreted a relief that he had made so little fuss. Selfish hypocrite!

He closed the door of his bedroom, got quickly into pajamas and dressing-gown, lay down under the eiderdown and, switching off the light, composed himself to wait patiently.

The moment for action was approaching. Herbert, one of those people who seemed to need very little sleep, would follow his invariable custom of reading a book by the library fire for some while after the rest of the household had gone to bed.

Alfred listened to the sounds in the old house and analyzed them as they occurred.

Once during this period he experienced a moment of uncertainty, which was when he heard Barbara pass his door on her way to her room. She stopped and went back to the landing. He thought he heard Donaldson's voice in a subdued key.

He smiled grimly. Was that brilliant young fellow already falling under her spell?

He heard her return after several minutes and noticed that she walked slowly. He resisted the strong impulse to open his door and speak to her, to see her alone for a moment, and to hold her closely in his arms. The thought of her embrace made him tremble. Time enough in the swiftly-approaching future.

She went into her room and the door closed. Donaldson's was too far away in the east wing to be heard, but Alfred detected his heavy tread on the polished oak as he crossed the landing into the passage which led to it.

What had they said to one another? It was an idle, vaguely jealous question. But he comforted himself with the knowledge that, if Donaldson was beginning to get tiresome, he could soon be dealt with when matters had been straightened out. Barbara was too attractive to be allowed any great degree of freedom. When Herbert was out of it, and she——

He forced his attention to the necessities of the present and, after lying there for twenty minutes, he swung his feet off the bed into a pair of felt-soled slippers.

He made no sound on the stairs and his movements across the darkened

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lounge towards the library door were no less silent. The thin line of light beneath it reassured him.

He opened it quietly, but without stealth, and closed it without undue noise.

Herbert, stretched out in an armchair with his shoes off, looked up from his reading and peered out of the restricted radiance of the reading-lamp on the small table by his side, the only light in the big room.

"It's I — Alfred. I forgot to look for a book before I went up."

He came within the radiance of light, his hands comfortably in his dressing-gown pockets.

Herbert eyed him keenly for a moment, seemed about to say something, changed his mind, and remarked:

"You read *An Experiment in Time*, didn't you? Try the third shelf over there, behind the chesterfield. Most of the newer books are there."

"Thanks."

Herbert returned to his book after a moment and Alfred moved to the shelf suggested. He was aware of an immense and stifling excitement. He glanced at the rows of books, but without seeing them. He strolled along the shelves, with his back to the man in the chair. He came close to the corner and the windows between which the Elizabethan poniard hung.

He concentrated on a title in front of him, and read it aloud.

"*Life of Machiavelli*, by Villari," he said. "Any good?"

"A little stolid. The Victorian biographical fashion." Herbert did not look round.

"H'm."

Alfred thought, "Machiavelli, the man of cunning and ingenuity."

Machiavelli — Machiavelli — The name ran in and out of his brain like a rat scampering in a bundle of hay. Keep still! Keep quiet!

He edged silently to the wall between the windows and lifted down the dagger. His mind slowed and became rational. Only his breathing was a little faster than normal as his grip closed round the hilt.

Murder in theory was now to be murder in fact. For a moment he had to nerve himself for the physical necessity of action.

The back of Herbert's head was visible above the chair. He was deeply engrossed. Alfred's four paces across the strip of carpet which lay between the windows and the fireplace were quite noiseless, and Herbert gave no sign of even a subconscious perception of the movement behind him.

But suddenly he spoke.

Alfred, with a tremor of anxiety, came to an abrupt stop within three feet of him, the dagger held out of sight. Then he realized, by the pitch of Herbert's voice, that he thought he was still at the other side of the room. In relief, he stepped swiftly backwards to the shelves again.

"What's that?" he asked.

"I said: 'Did you get my note?'"

"Note?"

"I put it on your dressing-table

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after dinner, before we started bridge. Never mind. You must have overlooked it." He glanced round and added: "Read it when you go up again. And before we close the subject finally, let me impress upon you that I mean every word of it."

Alfred was glad that he turned back to his book at that moment. He could not believe that his own quivering emotion, a mingling of rage and nervousness which he controlled with every particle of will he possessed, did not show in his face.

"I see," he said, and felt sure that the thickness of his tone was perceptible. "I'll remember. Yes. I must have overlooked it. I'll read it when I go up."

Written evidence that there had been trouble about money between them! Lying about on a dressing-table! That letter must be destroyed the moment he got back to his room. Destroyed beyond all tracing. He knew perfectly well what was in it. Typical of Mr. Justice Caithness! A categorical restatement in writing of his refusal to give his unsatisfactory cousin another penny!

Alfred moved again across the space of carpet, his mouth like a scar which is nearly healed, thin and mauve with the tenseness of his muscles. He was no longer conscious of hesitation, of physical reluctance. Savage determination burned in him like a fire.

Herbert did not speak this time, attentive to his book. However, a fraction of a second before the knife swept sideways over the armchair, he straightened himself a little, as though some sixth sense had begun to warn him of his peril.

But the small movement availed him nothing. Indeed, it exposed his side and made the blow more certain.

Alfred used all his strength. Far more, actually, than was necessary to reach the heart, driving the slim blade under the ribs at a slightly upward angle.

He whipped back his hand and left the weapon there.

A slight gasp, it could scarcely be called an exclamation, was the only sound with which Death came. The body twisted once and was still. The head lolled down onto the white shirt front.

Alfred stood motionless behind the chair for perhaps three age-long seconds, and then held out his hand in the white rays from the reading-lamp and stared at it. It was quite steady.

He looked up and saw the Caithness crest carved in the stone. It glowed redly in the firelight.

Funny. Even Herbert, lame and sedentary all his days, had come to his end by the sword. The aptness of it pleased strangely.

He took the white handkerchief from the dead man's breast pocket and, bending down, rubbed the hilt of the dagger clean of possible fingerprints. He arranged the handkerchief neatly in its pocket again and went to the window.

Kneeling on the wide sill, the curtains closed behind him, he took out a penknife, opened the window

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with his hand wrapped in the skirt of his dressing-gown, and scratched the paint-work of the frame where the latch came, so that it would look as though it had been forced from outside.

He shut the penknife and slipped it back into his dressing-gown pocket.

As he did so, he heard a short sound in the room. An inexplicable clatter. It brought his breath to a standstill, cutting him to the depths of his being with agonizing fear.

He slid off the sill onto the floor behind the curtains, his one instinct being to keep low and out of sight. He landed on hands and knees, rather heavily, crouching and in great fright lest he was bulging the bottom of the curtains.

He stayed there, utterly still, with every sense alert to define the slightest noise or movement in the room he could not see.

As the persistent quietness, unbroken after that one sound, reassured him somewhat, he crawled backwards a foot or so, and put his eye to the join of the curtains.

The library was peaceful, and held nothing living. The dead man's legs and his dangling right arm broke the silhouette of the armchair before the fire. They had not moved.

He stole across the room and saw that the book Herbert had been reading had dropped from his knees to the floor and, striking the shaft of a steel poker as it fell, had disturbed it on the stone hearth.

He brushed his lips with a nervous hand and had the presence of mind to leave the light switched on. A man who fled in haste would not wait to turn it off.

He went unhurriedly out of the library.

As he passed through the lounge he was conscious of a smarting sensation in the top of his thumb and sucked it mechanically. He felt a piece of broken skin with his tongue and wondered vaguely how he had done it.

But he was thinking of the letter on the dressing-table and the necessity for obliterating it. Burn it? Yes, in the wash-basin. Swill the ashes down the waste pipe.

He reached his room and found the letter, lying under his evening-dress collar. Showed how intent he must have been when he was undressing, not to have noticed it.

He tore it open and read it.

Dear Alfred,

Here it is, but positively I will not be able to do this again. I believe that you honestly want to succeed in this new project and I detect in you a different attitude. I think it is a genuine one.

Good luck,

Herbert.

A slip of pink paper, a blue stamp in the corner . . . a check for two thousand pounds.

He stared at it like a man in a trance. The unexpectedness of the thing found him without the capacity for adjustment. His mind flickered helplessly like a candle in a wind,

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and it was several moments before it gathered strength and direction.

Herbert had relented. Affection, generosity — heaven knew what — had moved him to alter his decision.

Herbert . . . whom he had killed.

He caught at his uncertain thoughts and strove to order them.

Then, with sudden uprising, resentment came to his aid.

The magnanimous prig! He had given the money, yes! But with a cramped spirit, reflecting that cramped soul!

He was glad he had killed him! *Glad!* He exulted in it.

And he had *not* killed him uselessly.

Had he been allowed to live there would still have remained the problem of Barbara. His death had set her free — free.

It had had to be. Fate had ordained that he should not see the letter until afterwards.

He would not dream of destroying it. Together with the check it removed beforehand any motive the authorities could find should they, by some impossible effort of imagination, suspect him.

He glanced at his wrist-watch. It congratulated him that he had been out of his bedroom exactly nine-and-a-half minutes.

He took off his dressing-gown and slid between the cold sheets.

But he did not sleep.

His deportment the next morning, during the hour of horror which followed the discovery of the murder by a housemaid, was precisely what it should have been. His pallor and shakiness were no more than to be expected. It was he who rang up the police station and, as a relative of the dead man, took upon his shoulders the burden of the affair in those respects which would have caused pain to Barbara.

He welcomed the Superintendent and the Detective-Inspector, and was exceedingly helpful to those individuals in their preliminary investigation. The tracks in the snow, the open window, and the fact that Mr. Justice Caithness had not infrequently received threatening letters of one kind or another, seemed to indicate the character and motive of the crime as clearly as any overworked policeman could desire.

"We'll get the fellow all right," said the Detective-Inspector, and he set about taking measurements and subjecting the library, the window, and the snow to an inch-by-inch examination. The Superintendent departed to make inquiries in the neighborhood for evidence of suspicious strangers.

Jim Donaldson seemed to be in a queer state, a profound silence. Only Barbara, in those moments when she could drag her mind from the numbness of shock, realized what he was feeling. Life had played him a trick. He had gained his heart's desire in the eleventh hour, but he had paid for it dearly.

He saw her alone for a moment during that terrible morning, and said:

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"I shall get over it, my dear, but I have an awful sensation, deep in me, that I have cheated somewhere, somehow."

She shook her head.

"*He* would not think so."

He took courage at that and saw the sun shining on the snow-burdened trees. Presently it would disappear, magically. . . .

Alfred, grim but professedly interested in the Detective-Inspector's procedure, watched the man at work. He was satisfied that all was going well but he was not blind to the sudden abstraction which came upon the police officer shortly before midday.

He saw him find a fingerprint, a single one, on the white paint of the window-sill and also (neither of them paid much attention to it at the moment) a toy soldier on the carpet just below it.

"One of young Robert's," Alfred explained. "He was playing with them here yesterday. He must have left this one ——"

He stopped.

The Detective-Inspector was puzzled by the fact that the print, which was so particularly clear except for an unevenness in the middle and looked like that of a left thumb, should be alone in its glory; then the Detective-Inspector noticed Alfred's sudden pause.

He did not realize that Alfred was struggling with a rising, an overwhelming panic, because he had seen that the tiny sword of the Lifeguardsman was bent and that something had dulled the brightness of its point.

"The sword —" Alfred muttered and, with his forefinger, felt the small place on the pad of his left thumb where the skin was broken. "Oh, my God! *By the sword!*"

The Detective-Inspector regarded him curiously and said nothing.

Counsel for the Defense did his best. He asked, was it sensible to suggest that a man should murder the person who had given him so many reasons for gratitude? Two thousand reasons, for example, that very evening?

But the jury thought it might be. Apart from all that, however, they were much impressed by the evidence of the fingerprint expert and the doctor, who together were unshakably convincing on the subject of the prisoner's left thumb. The blood-chemist proved very successfully that the print on the window-sill had not been there more than ten hours when the Inspector found it. The time it had been made corresponded with the time of the murder.

The prisoner displayed no great effort in denying the charge the Crown had brought against him. He listened to the proceedings without emotion, his eyes now and again fixing themselves in an unwavering stare on the smallest of the exhibits ranged on the table in the well of the court. A toy Lifeguard with a broken sword.

He was hanged in May.

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The last time we saw the Q. Patricks — at a monthly meeting of the New York chapter of the Mystery Writers of America — they told us an interesting anecdote about "Murder in the Alps." When the story was written originally, the locale was altogether different: it was on shipboard, perhaps thousands of miles away from the Alps. The tale was finished, submitted to "This Week," accepted, and paid for — and then a member of the editorial staff of "This Week" discovered a strong resemblance between the shipboard murder and an actual crime. Fearing possible repercussions (presumably some of the persons involved in the real-life case are still alive), it was decided to change the background of the story. So, the Q. Patricks, using basically the same material, transformed a ship at sea into a hotel in the Alps. Quite a trick, you'll admit, but as we have remarked in the past, the creative mind is the true Philosopher's Stone, and detective-story writers are the most astonishing magicians of our time. Nothing up our sleeves, ladies and gentlemen — the hand (on the typewriter) is quicker than the eye (on the printed page) — and after all, what is the difference between a porthole and a window? As the clue in a detective story, nothing — merely that one is on water and the other on land. And what is a ship but a floating hotel? Murder is not a phenomenon peculiar to any one place: its habitat is everywhere, on land and sea, in the air and under the ground. Murder has no nationality; it belongs to no special race or creed. It is a disease which infects the entire world, and like other death-dealing menaces to mankind, it is being dealt with: criminologists are the research workers, and detectives are the doctors — and through their efforts murder will not only out, but if real life follows the example set by fiction, be outlawed — in all its forms and manifestations, including that mass-wholesale type known as war . . .

MURDER IN THE ALPS

by Q. PATRICK

YOUNG LIEUTENANT TRANT OF THE New York Homicide Bureau sat in the palm lounge of Switzerland's most elegant winter sports resort, feeling bored. Around him, international skiers, turned night owls, were dancing and laughing as if Europe were still a playground. In the third

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week of a month's vacation, Trant was tired of mountain climbing, glamor and skis. His one authentic enthusiasm — his passion for murderers — had been starved.

He watched the dancers, hoping rather wistfully that one of them would drop dead under mysterious circumstances.

Jimmie, the British ski instructor, paused at his table, bringing with him a strong smell of liniment. Trant, who had his own aches and pains, asked sympathetically:

"Hello, Jimmie. How's the arm?"

"Still somewhat painful, sir."

Jimmie, with his sun-bleached hair and lazy smile, had been imported by an astute management to make the British clientele feel "at home abroad." He was the dream-boy of the English guests, particularly the female ones, and knew it. He was also colorfully informed as to the gossip of the Hotel St. Laurent. Trant, who took an unorthodox interest in the backstairs of life, had made the Yorkshire-born ski instructor his particular crony.

"And what of our girl friend and company tonight, Jimmie?"

He nodded across the lounge to a corner table where two young men and two girls, well sun-tanned, were making a stormy but striking quartet.

"Lady Mavis' party, sir?" Although Jimmie's speech and presence would have done credit to a duke, his British training kept him invariably respectful. "I'm afraid trouble may be brewing again, sir."

"Trouble," remarked Lieutenant Trant, "is something which Lady Mavis Mariner carries around like a pocketbook."

Jimmie grinned. "She is a bit of what you might call a magnet, sir."

"A magnet for males."

Trant alerted, for at the other side of the palm lounge the blonde had risen in apparent pique. Turning her back contemptuously on her companions, she skirted the dancers and made her way to Trant's table. She sat down and gave him a blinding smile which she then switched to Jimmie.

"Jimmie, darling, be an angel and rescue my pocketbook from those dreary people." As Jimmie hurried obediently off, Lady Mavis, England's prettiest, wealthiest, and probably most irritating bright young thing, moaned to Trant: "Darling, be nice to me. You're the only bearable male in Switzerland."

Lieutenant Trant, whose taste in women was also unorthodox, felt a certain weakness for Lady Mavis although, apart from a torrid physical appeal, she had nothing to recommend her. She was both silly and selfish and, although she worked overtime to fascinate every man in sight, she remained — he was sure — technically as virtuous as a police matron.

"What's the trouble tonight, Mavis?"

She shrugged. "My dear, so stupid. Just because that divine Larry Howard happens to think I have a talent for the films, Carlos smolders. And

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that revolting Claire Howard. Really, she thinks I'm trying to steal her husband! So vulgar and American of her."

From this rambling statement the experienced police officer in Trant deduced that Lady Mavis, who was currently engaged to the Mexican playboy, Carlos Villanueva, had been vamping the multimillionaire Hollywood producer, Larry Howard, thus infuriating both Howard's wife and her own fiancé.

"Really," continued Mavis, batting her huge lashes and looking almost unbearably luscious, "jealous people are so dismal. Let's dance."

Lady Mavis' dancing was an expert seduction: Sinuous in Trant's arms and headily perfumed with *Tantalizing*, she murmured: "You really are intriguing. So mysterious. I'm sure you do something fascinating."

Trant, who knew he was being exploited merely to make Carlos Villanueva and the "divine" Larry Howard that much more dismally jealous, grinned at her affectionately.

"I'm only clay in the potter's hands."

They went back to the table. Jimmie had brought Lady Mavis' pocketbook. Mavis dazzled at him.

"Jimmie, you're a duck. Please be a lamb and wax my skis. We're starting early tomorrow and I've got to have them done tonight."

Jimmie, all ducal gallantry, said: "Of course, Lady Mavis."

"They're in the cabin. My maid will let you in. Just bring them back and put them on the porch when they're done."

As Jimmie disappeared, Mavis said to Trant: "There's still nothing like English service, is there? Darling, let's dance again."

Lady Mavis danced long and shamelessly enough with Trant to drive her erstwhile companions, one after the other, from the plush hotel lounge.

Having achieved her objective, she withdrew in pursuit of other game. Trant got trapped into an emotional chess match with the hotel manager and it was one-fifteen before he escaped to his own elegant front room. As he opened the window, an eccentric mountain squall roared in from the darkness outside, scattering everything off the tables and toppling a lamp. He started to restore order, reflecting that Lady Mavis was like a Swiss wind gust.

She too toppled everyone in her path.

He awoke next morning at nine to an agitated Swiss voice saying: "*M'sieur . . . M'sieur.*"

It was the assistant manager announcing anxiously that the manager wanted him immediately in Lady Mavis' chalet. When they reached the little lodge, cradled in pine trees, which was the hotel's most expensive accommodation, they found the manager alone in the living room, looking distracted.

"M. Trant. *Mon Dieu*, I need the policeman. Lady Mavis disappear."

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He told Trant what he knew. Lady Mavis' Paris-imported maid had come, as usual, from the servants' wing, to make morning tea at seven and had found the chalet empty. She was familiar with all of Mavis' clothes and was sure that none of them was missing except the red velvet dress she had worn the night before.

Ignoring the hovering assistant manager, the manager concluded: "Ah, M. Trant, if I telephone the *préfecture* there is perhaps the unnecessary *scandale*. But you, *Monsieur* — one hears of your so great reputation with the unpleasantnesses of America."

Trant, modestly silent, began to search the room and then moved into the bedroom. The bed was neatly made. The heavy plate-glass window was shut. The wrap Lady Mavis had worn the night before was slung over a chair. There was an overpowering — even for Mavis — odor of *Tantalizing*. A glance at the dressing table showed a bottle of the perfume almost empty. Intrigued, Trant traced the odor to an area by a deep, blue armchair where it seemed at its strongest. He dropped to his knees and observed a faint darkish stain on the flowered carpet. It was still a trifle damp. He discovered a similar smaller stain on a pillow from the sofa in her room.

"*Alors*, is it blood?" asked the manager.

"I don't think so." Trant moved to the window, pushed it up and peered intently at the sill. He gave a little grunt. "Look."

At his side, the manager looked. Caught on a wood splinter was a scrap of red velvet.

Trant gazed soberly down the steep sloping bank to a large snowdrift among the pines. A few minutes later, he, the manager, and the assistant manager, with shovels, discovered Lady Mavis in the snowdrift — dead.

Crouched by the body, Trant felt a cosmic pity for Lady Mavis and all other foolish young women who reap what they sow.

"I'm afraid that she's been murdered. Probably smothered by a pillow from the sofa in her room," he added sadly.

But only part of him was sad. The other part was musing on Mavis' murderer as a hungry owl might muse on a mouse.

They moved around the side of the chalet to its little front porch which faced away from the hotel's façade toward the glistening Alps. Mavis' skis were balanced precariously against the wall. Since the "*scandale*" was now inevitable, the assistant manager was commissioned to telephone the *préfecture* at Lausanne.

Trant remarked almost plaintively: "Now the police are coming, you won't need me."

"But yes, *Monsieur*." The manager was wringing his hands. "All the way from Lausanne they must come. And such questions, such crudities. . . . Ah, please."

Trant beamed and called after the assistant manager: "Send Jimmie, and his roommate."

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Soon Jimmie arrived with one of the Swiss ski instructors. From their distraught faces, it was plain they had been told the news.

Trant said: "Did you wax Lady Mavis' skis last night, Jimmie?"

"Yes, sir."

"When did you bring them back?"

"At one, sir."

"What did you do?"

"I knocked. Lady Mavis answered she was going to bed — to leave them on the porch."

"Then what?"

"I went to my room, sir."

Trant turned to the Swiss ski instructor. "You check on that?"

"Yes, sir. I wake up when Jimmie comes in. We sit a while to talk."

"What time was it?"

"Just after one, sir." He glanced at the large silver watch on his wrist. "I look at my watch when I wake up."

At that moment the assistant manager returned with a little old man whom Trant recognized as the night bus boy. The assistant manager said:

"*Monsieur*, André has something to say."

"Ah, *Monsieur*," began André. "*C'est terrible. C'est . . .*"

"Speak English," said the manager severely, "in front of the distinguished detective."

André announced: "Last night at one thirty, sounds the buzz-buzz from the chalet of Lady Mavis. I hurry here. I knock. Answers a man's voice in English: *Is all right. Only Lady Mavis has trouble with the window. Now is fixed.* I say: Okay, I leave."

"One thirty." Trant watched him. "What was this man's voice like?"

"From a foreign land. Not from England. Not from France. Heavy with foreign accent."

The manager flung up his hands. "Ah, she is engaged to the Mexican gentleman."

Trant made no comment. He stood a moment reflectively. Then he said: "I'm going to need an assistant. Since Lady Mavis' murderer was certainly here at one thirty, Jimmie is alibied. Can I have him?"

"But of course, *Monsieur*."

Trant patted Jimmie's arm. "Find Mr. and Mrs. Howard and Mr. Villanueva. Tell them the manager wants to see them in his office. And use that well-known tact."

In the manager's chic office Trant and the manager questioned the three suspects.

Mrs. Claire Howard, a vivid red-headed ex-actress with a knife for a tongue, said:

"I'm prostrated by grief. I couldn't be sorrier if the python at the Bronx Zoo kicked the bucket."

Although she made no effort to conceal her resentment of Mavis' behavior with her husband, she was firmly alibied by the testimony of an elderly Italian prima donna who swore she had been telling Mrs. Howard's fortune between one and one thirty.

Larry Howard was more conventionally distressed than his wife. He fussed with his hand-painted tie, looked more like a movie idol than

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any of the stars on his payroll, and kept repeating: "So tragic . . . such a lovely girl . . . so gifted . . ."

He too had what seemed like a perfect alibi. After leaving the palm lounge the night before, he had run into a big-game hunting friend and had spent the significant time period in the hunter's suite, discussing the most sportsmanlike way of killing a zebra. The hunter corroborated this.

After these two had apparently cleared themselves, Carlos Villanueva was pitifully without defense. The elegant, mournful-eyed Mexican denied having been in his fiancée's chalet but had absolutely no alibi. All he could say for himself was that, humiliated by Mavis' shameless flirtation with Larry Howard, he had paced the moonlit mountainside for hours in an attempt to console himself.

"But Mavis was my heart," he announced with Latin fervor. "You cannot accuse me of murdering my *corazón*."

After he had gone, Trant no longer looked bored. In fact there was a gleam of pleasurable anticipation in his eyes. The manager said: "So we are left with this Villanueva, yes? No alibi — the foreign accent, not of England, not of France."

"Foreign accents can be assumed," suggested Trant mildly. "And it's too early to talk of alibis."

The manager looked alarmed. "You mean others of my guests could have killed her?"

"They could have killed her," Trant agreed, "but they didn't."

"Monsieur, you do not tell that you know who is this murderer!"

"Oh, yes," murmured Trant with an exasperatingly casual shrug, "I've suspected it for half an hour. Now I'm sure."

The manager stared. "*Zut!*" he said.

The manager, now in a state of blind adoration, fell in with Trant's requests. They were simple. He merely wanted to interview the three suspects individually in Lady Mavis' chalet. While the assistant manager went off to arrange this, Trant stationed the night bus boy in Mavis' bathroom with instructions to emerge if he heard the foreign voice he had heard the night before. Once he was at his post, Trant and his assistant moved into Lady Mavis' bedroom. Trant sat down, lit a cigarette, and offered one to Jimmie.

"Mr. Howard's coming first, Jimmie. When he arrives, I want you to wait in the living room in case I need help."

"Very well, sir."

Trant's gray eyes were pensive. "Jimmie, you've had plenty of experience with rich women on Swiss vacations. You can help me on a point of psychology. A lot of them throw their bonnets over the Alps, don't they?"

Jimmie grinned. "They're apt to be in a holiday mood, sir."

"Exactly. But Lady Mavis was different. That's the point about her. She vamped like Salome but when the

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time came to crash through, it's my hunch she went colder than a Pilgrim mother."

"That's how I'd sum her up, sir."

"All right, Jimmie, before Mr. Howard arrives, let's assume for a moment that I'm the murderer." Trant smiled contentedly at this hypothesis. "Lady Mavis certainly hurled her all at me last night. Suppose I'd taken her up on it and come here to the chalet expecting a Big Romantic Moment. What would I have got? The don't-touch-me-you-nasty-man routine.

"Suppose I was vain, used to easy conquests. Suppose I got rough. Suppose she rang for the bus boy. Suppose I was married, for example, and realized what an awkward spot I'd be in if the bus boy reported an attempted assault to the manager. Say I put the pillow from the sofa over Mavis' face to keep her from calling out when the bus boy knocked, planning to reason with her later and to calm her down. Okay. The bus boy came.

"I invented some trouble with the window to explain the ring and to get rid of him. Later — after André had gone — I realized to my horror that I had been rougher than I thought. I had smothered Lady Mavis."

Trant looked at his own hands as if they were the hands of a smotherer.

"There was Lady Mavis lying in the chair — dead. I hadn't intended to kill her, but it was done. I got into a panic. Wouldn't death from smothering look very like death from exposure? If I dropped the body out of the window and closed the window, she might not be found in the snowdrift for some time and, when she was found, they might think she'd died accidentally from exposure. At least it was safer than leaving her there in the armchair. How's that fit, Jimmie?"

"It fits, sir. But what about the foreign accent?"

"Oh, I left out a couple of details. The accent, for example. And the spilled perfume." Trant nodded to the stained area on the carpet. "The perfume's simple. There was that stain on the rug and on the pillow from the sofa. Although the murderer was rattled, he knew he had to remove them. He used the perfume, but I'm afraid he didn't completely succeed. The police analysis will show what the stain is."

"What is it, sir?"

Lieutenant Trant rose. Suddenly he seemed depressed.

"He was rather a vain murderer. As the glamor boy of the Hotel St. Laurent, he was used to conquests. He thought that Lady Mavis, with her 'darlings' and 'angels,' should be as much of a pushover as the others. It must have been humiliating when he came into this chalet last night as a Don Juan to find that Lady Mavis just thought of him as a presumptuous underling. It was frightening, too, to know that she was going to report him to the manager. That would have meant an end to an excellent job."

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Jimmie sprang to his feet.

"But the stain rather gave him away," continued Trant quietly. "The small one on the pillow probably smeared off your strained arm. But the one on the rug — I suppose a tube of the stuff dropped out of your pocket and got stepped on in the struggle. You had to use that perfume, didn't you, not only to remove the stain but to kill the smell of liniment."

"But . . ."

"The skis give you away too, Jimmie. You say you put them on the porch at one o'clock. The porch faces in the same direction as my room — toward the front. Last night at one fifteen there was a wind squall which scattered my things. Certainly it would have toppled those precariously balanced skis. No, you brought the skis in here first and took them out onto the porch after you'd killed Lady Mavis — after the wind squall at one fifteen.

"And I'm afraid your neat alibi can be broken too. Your roommate said he woke up when you came in. He woke up because you deliberately awakened him, didn't he? But before you awakened him, you switched the hands of his watch. It was easy to stay awake yourself until he fell asleep again and then to turn the hands forward to the correct time."

The ski instructor's ducal composure had fled and with it his elegant accent. He was a frightened little mill boy again and lapsed into a broad Yorkshire dialect: "Yer caan't say thaat a'me, zur. She war craazed fur me. She asked me ter coom oop. Ah didn't knaw. Ah didn't meean her."

The bus boy burst out of the bathroom. "That is it! Is the foreign voice I hear last night."

Jimmie swung to him. "Eh, maan, yer caan't —"

"That's all we needed," interrupted Trant quietly. "People almost always revert to their natural dialect when they're rattled, Jimmie. No wonder André thought that Yorkshire brogue of yours was a foreign accent."

He nodded the bus boy out of the chalet. Alone with Jimmie, he felt a twinge of sadness.

He said: "You didn't mean to kill her. I'm sure of that and I'll do everything I can when the police come. I'm sorry, Jimmie. I set a trap for you. I feel like a heel."

Jimmie had managed to turn himself into the model hotel employee again. He smiled a ghost of his engaging smile. "That's all right, sir. After all, it's your job."

There were times when Lieutenant Trant took a low view of his profession.

This was one of them.

Watch EQ on TV

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It has been a long time — too long a time — since we brought you a new Dr. Sam: Johnson story. But here is "The Triple-Lock'd Room," and we owe its existence to one of the author's very good friends, one Peter Page, singer, wit, and connoisseur of mysteries.

Yes, Mr. Peter Page must shoulder the responsibility for Lillian de la Torre's tale of an 18th-century lock'd-room murder — as fascinating a tale as has ever come from that charming lady's quill. You will find the dramatis personæ well nigh irresistible: a mountebank rope-dancer, a seven-foot Abyssinian traveller, a "strange knot of Jamaicans," a pug and a paraqueet — to say nothing of the great lexicographer himself and his ever-present (to reverse history) Watson.

The story was born on the day Peter Page welcomed Lillian de la Torre to Chicago with a couple of drinks in the famed Pump Room of the Ambassador. The Pump Room struck Miss de la Torre as pure 18th-century Bath — the panelled walls, the golden scrolls, the powdered flunkeys, the gilded pages — all in perfect, exquisite key. And as Miss de la Torre drank in the daiquiris and the atmosphere, her imagination, doubly-warmed, perceived in a flash what a dangerous device that suave 18th-century gilding covered; and full-armoured, the story sprang into being . . .

THE TRIPLE-LOCK'D ROOM

by LILLIAN DE LA TORRE

(as recorded by James Boswell, London, 1775)

THE AFFAIR OF THE TRIPLE-LOCK'D room began as an affair of gallantry, and ended as an affair of mystery and horror. The scene of the tragedy was commonplace enough, being the staymaker's house where I lodged near Piccadilly. The *dramatis personæ* all lodged there. The strange knot of Jamaicans had the parlour floor. Sanry the drunken rope-dancer pigged it in the attick. The two-pair-of-stairs floor was divided between James Bruce the Abyssinian traveller and your humble servant, James Boswell younger of Auchinleck, advocate, amateur of crime, and friend to the great Sam: Johnson.

Everybody snubbed the rope-dancer; Bruce the traveller snubbed everybody but the Jamaican lady; and the Jamaican lady snubbed nobody. 'Twas pleasant to attend her levee of mornings before I set out on my daily ramble. On a memorable

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day in that summer of 1775, Dr. Sam: Johnson was my companion in the lady's chamber.

Her name was Mrs. Winwood. She was newly come to London from the plantations to set up for a lady of fashion; and her *boudoir* lacked no detail of the *ton*. 'Twas all in the Chinese taste. The four-poster bed was richly canopied in China damask. Mr. Chippendale's Chinese chairs were everywhere. There was plenty of red and gold lacquer. An ornate cabinet held ivory knickknacks. Gold dragons two feet high writhed up the japanned coal-box and coiled about its brass handles. The fire-place had a brass fender, and for the summer a fan of white paper in the grate. A Gothick book with gilded margins lay open on a marquetry table, though I seriously doubted whether Mistress Winwood could read its crabbed black-letter. Next it a small Benares coffer, open, revealed a blaze of jewelry within.

We had the field to ourselves, save for the lady's fashionable menagerie of creatures. A motley paraqueet pranced on a carven stand. A snubby creature of the canine kind blinked on a silken cushion, half-closing contemptuous eyes in a sooty face.

"'Tis a picture," cried I, surveying the scene, "from the pencil of Mr. Hogarth!"

"Aye," assented Dr. Johnson, "it shall be called *The Lady's Toilette-table*."

Indeed only my burly friend himself in his old snuff-brown suit was out of drawing as he sat oscillating upon one of the Chippendale chairs, causing the chair to creak ominously and the Jamaican lady to flinch.

'Twas the sweetest little pink-and-gold pocket Venus ever I saw, sitting at her toilette-table among a confusion of patch-boxes and ribbands, her mask, her fan, her stay-lace, her pomander, lying lost in the litter. She wore a sacque of willow-green tissue, frothing with lace about a bosom more revealed than hid. There were diamonds at throat, wrist, and bosom. The waves of her dusky hair were piled high. She wore a patch like a half-moon beside one liquid black eye, and a patch like a star at the edge of the tiny, perfect pout of her mouth. Her skin glowed like a golden peach. She smiled upon us with pursed lips, making a mouth like a kiss. I could have been her knight-errant.

Much I envied the tiny black page who leaned at her knee. Not that the little savage appreciated his position; for though gorgeous in cloth-of-gold caftan and turban plumed and jewelled, he bore in his ugly brown face a timeless sorrow.

"Sure 'tis a Lilliputian philosopher," remarked Dr. Sam: Johnson, scanning the impassive face.

"A pygmy Nestor —" I concurred.

Johnson quoted:

"*Klagge tai ge petontai ep' okeanoio rhoaon,*
Andrasi Pygmaioisi phonon kai kera pherousai."

"O, Lord, Sir, spare us your Greek!" cried I. "What does this

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little animal understand of Homer's works?"

"Little enough, I'll wager. What would you give, my lad," bending to place his great paw on the small cloth-of-gold shoulder, "what would you give to learn about Homer?"

The dark eyes blinked.

"Pompey give what he have, sah," piped the page.

Dr. Johnson was much pleased with his answer.

"Sir," said he to me, "a desire of knowledge is the natural feeling of mankind; and every human being, whose mind is not debauched, will be willing to give all that he has to get knowledge."

I doubt whether either Pompey or his mistress understood this discourse. Dr. Johnson, however; whose good sense keeps pace with his benevolence, omitted to gratify Pompey with an account of the Greek poet. He gratified him rather with a thing more to the purpose, namely sixpence; and the lady, pleased, patted the small golden shoulder.

Standing at her back, her waiting-woman glowered and muttered. Sure never had pocket Venus a stranger Abigail. She was a powerful mulatto, not tall, but wide, with watchful black eyes in a broad ugly face. Above her narrow furrowed brow she had twisted a clout of red marked with tortuous figures of black. Her red stuff gown strained with muscle as her arms moved. With an angry jerk she fastened a brilliant pin like a coach-and-four in the lady's tower of curls, and said something between her teeth to the little brown page. He shrank against the lady.

"Ma'am," says Dr. Sam: Johnson bluntly, ignoring this by-play, "you've not brought me hither to discuss Homer. Pray what is it that disquiets you?"

Mistress Winwood gave him a level look.

"I will tell you," said she. "You must know that I went with the company of comedians to Jamaica. I was much admired in both comedy and tragedy, and thus I formed many — friendships —" said the lady delicately, "and received many a gift of jewels, before I married. My husband was a rich planter of Montego Bay, and 'twas his pleasure to adorn me with still handsomer jewels of his own providing. He bought me my mulatto woman, whom you see here, and nothing was wanting that would satisfy me. But alas, within short months, the sultry vapours of Jamaica had carried off my beloved Mr. Winwood, and I was left to mourn."

A tear stole down the golden cheek.

"There was naught left for me but to leave the scene of my sorrow and begin life anew. I realized my holdings. I took my jewels, and Hannah her little son, and hither came we — to find," the comedian inclined gracefully in my direction, "friendship and consolation in Mr. Boswell."

This was fast progress! I returned the inclination, with a smile into which I infused as much meaning as I could.

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"What's this to the purpose?" growled Johnson.

"Why, Sir, the jewels. They lie there," she nodded towards the Benares coffer, "and I go in fear for jewels and life together."

"How so, ma'am?"

"Look. I found under my pillow last night — *this*."

Dr. Sam: Johnson looked with contempt on the strange toy she displayed. 'Twas nothing so fearsome, being most like a shuttlecock, made of white feathers bound together with long dark hair. The bunch protruded from a little sack of yellow leather, stuck with seven pins.

"Foh," said Dr. Johnson. "This is a child's toy; this is one of Pompey's amusements. Come here, boy."

Pompey, idly whisking flies by the window, looked around, and began to approach. When he saw the white feather toy he stood stock still, and would approach no further.

"Come on, boy. Acknowledge your property."

Pompey put his little black hands behind him.

"No, sah. Not Pompey's."

He backed into the chimney-corner. As the rusty wig and the glossy black head bent together over the feathered shuttlecock, the jewelled turban sought diversion. First he tried the pug-dog's temper, who shewed ugly teeth. Then he reached up and pulled the paraqueet's tail-feathers. For that he got a sharp jab in his small brown finger, and one crimson drop started. Savagely he bit at the torn place with his sharp white teeth, and his eyes rolled in anger. The next thing I knew, he had bundled the paraqueet, chain and all, into the Chinese box, and slammed the slanting lid. Then ensued such a clanking and squawking as brought the lady from her shuttlecock and the mulatto from the toilette-table. Mistress Winwood released the indignant bird, which sat on her finger croaking. Hannah gave the erring page a box o' the ear that staggered him, and then dragged him screaming into the backward regions.

As his cries faded, peace returned. Mistress Winwood set the paraqueet back on his perch and refastened the chain. Dr. Johnson returned his attention to the shuttlecock.

"'Twas under my pillow," the lady told him, "and I found it there in the morning. And last night after I blew out my candle, something outside tried to lift the hook on my door. I cried out, and it went away."

"Let us look at this door-fastening." Dr. Sam: Johnson heaved his great bulk erect and lumbered to the door. The lady followed him, and I followed her.

'Twas the slightest of hooks, that fell into a loop of metal affixed to the jamb.

"'Twill never do, ma'am," says my ingenious friend. "Any knife-blade can lift it from without. We'll fix you bolts above and below, that shall repel intruders and make you and your jewels safe."

"Let it be as you wish," said the

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lady. "Yet I trust no lock nor bolt, I. Pray, Mr. Boswell, take upon you to watch my door from without, that nobody enters to do me harm."

The lady put forth this unreasonable request with so ravishing a smile, I had no heart to refuse; though in truth I had preferred to be a watcher 'tother side of the bolt.

"Then I'll join you," cried Dr. Johnson, reading my mind, "to preserve the proprieties."

"Damn your proprieties!" cried I inwardly.

As we stood thus clustered about the door, a mighty rapping upon the other side of the panel startled us. We gave ground.

"Enter," said Mistress Winwood.

Whereupon, ducking under the door-frame, in marched quite the tallest man I had ever seen without first paying a fee. 'Twas James Bruce, the Abyssinian traveller, who lodged in the second floor front. He stood a magnificent seven feet.

'Twas my first view of my fellow-lodger. Mistress Winwood made him known to us, and he bowed without a word. His presence in the lady's chamber, seven feet tall and handsome as a god, boded little good to the suit of James Boswell, five-feet odd and indifferent pretty. I seated myself sullenly.

The seven-foot Scotchman chose a dubious Chippendale chair, and sat mum. We sat as mum, and tried to freeze him. But the lady shone upon him. Under her smile and her wide-eyed interest, he thawed indeed, and began to regale us with wonders. I saw Dr. Sam: Johnson shift and mutter uneasily at the romantick traveller's story. We must needs hear of the fabled lyre of the antient Egyptians —

"There's one liar the less in Egypt," muttered Dr. Johnson *sotto voce*, "now that you're returned to London —"

Unhearing, the fabulous traveller fabled on, of the Abyssinians, who cut their steaks from the living cow, and the Watussi, a race of giants, who absolutely looked down their noses at a mere seven feet, and the Wambutti —

"Who," burst in Johnson, unable to brook more wonders, "have no doubt their heads beneath their shoulders, as Mandeville fabled before you. Sir, your servant, I've had enough of romantick extravagance, so I'll e'en take my leave. Ma'am, yours, and we'll wait upon you after supper."

Perforce I made my bow, and left the giant master of the field.

As we mounted to my lodging above, we encountered the rope-dancer. He was running, absolutely running, down the balustrade. The man had the feet of a fly. When he saw me, he came to a halt by dropping lightly to the landing. He seized me by the lappet and breathed alcoholic fumes in my face.

"Pray, Mr. Boswell," he whined, "a trifle till Monday; for then I'll be *flush* of the *cole*, I assure 'ee, as 'tis Hoxham Fair, and I'll dance on the rope again."

I looked at the narrow keel of a

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face, the rough wigless head, the close-set darting eyes, and liked him ill.

"Be off," said I, "for I've nothing on me."

"Then I know who has," replied he insolently, "where there's a little fellow-feeling too for a poor mountebank —"

And he danced off down the stair on his long shoeless toes. I heard him clatter at the Jamaican actress's door. So, Mr. Abyssinian traveller, I reflected sourly, where's your tête-à-tête now?

'Twas the rope-dancer, after all, who held the field. He was still there when we returned after supper, wigless and unbuttoned, working his long unshod feet on the fender and drinking tea from a flowery saucer. He pulled a long face when he saw us, and rose unwillingly to go. As he strolled to the door he jingled a pocketful, as if to flaunt the success of his errand. At the door he turned with his hand on the latch. He gave the Jamaican lady a servile congee, included us in an insolent nod, and drew the door softly to.

"Poor man," said Mistress Winwood, "the life of the stroller is thorny."

We in our turn drank tea from flowery saucers. Then we gave the lady into the broad black hands of Hannah, who dighted her for bed while we waited in the passage.

When the pug and the paraqueet had been turned out, and the black woman had retired to her pallet, it came our turn. Quietly we entered the chamber. How my heart beat as the tinkling voice greeted us from the shadow of the Chinese damask bed-curtains. The lady lay on the pillow, pallid as her linens, in a cloud of black hair. Her night-rail was another froth of lace, held with a diamond brooch.

"Have no fear, ma'am," says Dr. Sam: Johnson, "for here's what shall make all secure."

From his capacious pocket he dragged two stout bolts, and we proceeded to affix them on either side the hook, half-way up and half-way down the stout wooden door.

"Now, ma'am," says he, "with your permission I'll e'en make fast the window —"

"There's no need," says she, "for the wall falls sheer."

"Here's a balcony," said Dr. Johnson, peering out into the summer moonlight.

"That only a fly could come at," replied Mistress Winwood, "on that smooth brick wall."

"Then we'll lock out the flies," said Dr. Johnson firmly, and swung the catch tight.

"And pray, Dr. Johnson," whispered the lady, shame-faced, "look under the bed."

We looked under the bed. No desperado lurked there. But Dr. Johnson advanced the candle, and from a murky corner picked up some small object. On our knees on the Chinese rug we scanned it. 'Twas another shuttlecock. Dr. Johnson shook his

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head over it, and hastily concealed it from the lady in his capacious pocket.

"Nothing," said he to Mistress Winwood; "but we'll give the rest of the chamber a turnout."

We looked in the wardrobe. Nothing but the lady's silken gowns, breathing otto. We looked up the chimney. Nothing but soot. We looked into every corner that might conceal a man. Nothing but candle-shadows.

"All's safe, ma'am," said Dr. Johnson. "Do you hook and bolt after us, and your citadel is triple-lock'd."

"Good night," whispered she.

I bowed in the dark, not daring to approach and kiss her hand, and we took our leave.

Behind us we heard the hook fall into place and the bolts ram home.

There was a damask sofa in the shadowy hall, and there we sat ourselves. The line of light under the door died as the lady blew out her candle. The house was still a while.

Beside me Dr. Sam: Johnson yawned mightily.

"This is a sleeveless errand," muttered he. "We have eased the lady's mind; let us ease ourselves with a bed. Nothing can come at Mistress Winwood through yonder triple-lock'd door. Come, let us go up."

'Twas my secret hope that through the triple-lock'd door, if I but waited long enough, would come the lady seeking the solace of my presence.

"Do you go up," said I.

"You'll come with me," said my stern mentor, "for a rake-helly young dog."

I could but laugh, and follow. We stole to the house-door, and opened it gently. I thought at the far end of the passage a door was eased open, but I could not be sure. We drew the door to, and mounted the stair.

My coat and waistcoat were off, and I was attacking my breeches-buttons, when I heard Mistress Winwood scream. In my shirt as I was I ran down the stair, and Dr. Sam: Johnson lumbered behind. As I ran the screaming ceased abruptly, to be succeeded by a silence more sinister yet. I ran down the long hall, thrust aside the mulatto woman where she stood dumbly shaking the door-handle, and flung myself against the panels.

We had done our work too well. The three locks held. Dr. Johnson added his great strength to mine, but to no purpose. If one lock gave, the others held it in line.

In a moment the seven-foot Scotchman ran in in his shirt-sleeves. In another moment the shoeless rope-dancer joined us, fully sober and fully cloathed, with his hair on end. We all four rushed at the door. It was too stout.

"Fetch the axe!" cried Dr. Johnson.

"Fetch a rope!" cried the mountebank. "If a rope be stretched from yonder tree opposite my window, I'll engage to walk across and so in at Mistress Winwood's casement."

"'Tis lock'd."

"A window may be smashed."

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"A door may be smashed. Fetch the axe."

"Do you wield the axe. I'll adventure by the rope."

"Do so," cried the Abyssinian traveller. "I've what shall assist you, which I used in climbing the Mountains of the Moon. 'Tis as it were a grappling-hook, which shall carry your rope from the ground to the balcony, and so a man may swarm up like a monkey."

"Do you break in like a monkey," cried Dr. Sam: Johnson contemptuously, "I'll break in like a man. Where's the axe?"

The explorer and the rope-dancer rushed off. The mulatto was dispatched backwards for the axe. We once more put our shoulders to the stout panels. In vain. At last we desisted and wiped our brows.

At that instant we heard from within the tinkle of breaking glass, and then the window creaked up. Another long moment, and we heard the three locks released. The door opened, and the mountebank stood before us. He was whiter than his ruffles.

"Mistress Winwood is dead," said he.

We stepped sombrely in. The mountebank touched flame to the candles. James Bruce hauled himself over the sill and entered; his shoes crunched on the broken glass of the window.

The Jamaican lady lay dead in her bed. A carving knife was buried to the hilt in the disordered laces of her night-rail. Save for that disorder, the room was as we left it.

"This is the work of the devil himself!" cried the mountebank, going green as he took in the situation. He looked fearfully behind him at our shadows wavering on the wall. "The window was lock'd tight; I had to break it. The door was hooked and double-bolted; you heard me lift the hook and undo the twin bolts. How could anything human do this, and make its way out again?"

A horrible cry, as from the Tartarian Lake, broke out behind us. With jangled nerves I forced my head to turn. The mulatto stood in the doorway with the axe in her hand. As I looked at her she dropped the axe and fell to the floor by the bedside.

"Damballa Oueddo!" she cried. "Ezilee! Ogoun Badagris!"

"These are devils she calls on!" cried the rope-dancer. "This woman it is that has called up fiends to do this devil's work!"

"This is devil's work," said Dr. Johnson heavily, "and the devil is flown through the triple-lock'd door; or it is man's work — and the man is still here."

With one consent we fell to searching. The mulatto woman ignored us, and pursued her own strange rites. She cut a tress of the shadowy hair, and bound it around her wrist. She traced on the floor, in powder, designs I could not fathom. When the designs were complete, and muttered over, she set about kindling a fire.

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Dr. Johnson did not check her; he had already got soot on his venerable brow assuring himself there was still nothing else up the chimney. Backward she went for coals. I stared at her strength; she heaved the hod in, filled, as easily as she had carried it out. It must have held a quarter-chaldron.

Hunched over the grate she struck flint and steel. The paper fan blazed; she blew up the coals. When she had a good glow, she laid aside the bellows and, crouching over the flame, she began to mutter. Again she called upon Damballa and Ogoun Badagris, rocking herself from side to side.

Our search was over. We had repeated in every detail our search of one short hour before; and as before, had found nothing. We stood to watch the woman's curious proceedings.

"What do you do, good woman?" enquired Bruce curiously.

"I find the murderer. I see him in the flame."

"This is a rank superstition!" cried Dr. Johnson.

"Sir," said Bruce, "it may be; but I have seen in Africa such things as have made me wonder. What do you see, good woman?"

"I see a man. He comes down like a juju from the sky. He breaks the window, and turns back the bolt, and enters the room. I see him approach my lady. She screams. He strikes. Ah!"

The woman hid her face and wailed. The rope-dancer turned to Bruce.

"Your balcony is directly above. How easy to descend —"

"And break the glass?" Bruce caught him up. "*You* broke the glass. I saw you do it."

"And we heard you!" cried I.

"Perhaps Mistress Winwood admitted him," said the rope-dancer.

"If you were a gentleman," I cried hotly, "I'd call you to account for such a word!"

"Nay," said Bruce coolly, "let him prate. If the lady let me in, who let me out after the lady lay dead? Who shot the bolts after me? Robin Goodfellow belike? Or was it done by enchantment?"

"Why," said I slowly, "there's a way to shoot bolts from without. 'Tis done with packthread, and they shewed in court how it was done when they tried Sarah Malcolm."

"And the hook?"

"There must be a way for that too."

"And so," said Bruce with his cold smile, "you came running, and found me at the door with a handful of packthread!"

"We did not, Sir," owned Dr. Johnson. "Enough of this. This is matter for Bow Street. Let the watch be called."

I bellowed "Pompey!" into the hall. The rope-dancer at the broken window was bawling "Watch!"

"The child is too little," protested Hannah. "He will get lost."

The child in question came trotting down the hall to cut her short. He was in his little shirt-tail, rubbing his eyes as he trotted along.

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"Pompey here, sah."

A shout from the rope-dancer ended the matter. The watch had heard, and was even now upon the stair. Another moment, and in came the watchman in his antient coat to the heels, with his flapped hat, his lanthorn, and his staff. He saw at once how things stood, and acted decisively. First he opened the coffer of jewels.

"They are all there," said Hannah. "Nothing is missing."

Then he bellowed for his mate, and they took us all up.

They took us up! — me, James Boswell Esq: of Auchinleck, James Bruce the Abyssinian traveller, and Dr. Sam: Johnson the great lexicographer!

I would have made indignant proclamation of our names and qualities, but Dr. Johnson checked me with a look. The great man preferred to spend the night in the round-house with an unemployed rope-dancer and two Jamaican slaves!

So to the round-house we went. As we paraded on the pavement, I saw in the moonlight the rope dangling from the balcony, by which the rope-dancer had ascended. The great grappling-hook was plain to see, caught over the balcony rail. It had three prongs, and a ball to throw it by.

Late ramblers must have stared at the strange procession. As was his unhappy wont, Dr. Sam: Johnson lurched along muttering to himself, and touching the posts of the footway as he passed. The rope-dancer's narrow feet skimmed along without shoes; he seemed oblivious of the uneven paving-blocks. The mulatto woman slouched and mumbled. James Bruce the Abyssinian traveller strode along like a king. At first little Pompey trotted along behind like a puppy; but after a while Mr. Bruce took pity on his short legs and hoisted him to a towering shoulder.

Thus, each wrapped in who knows what thoughts, our ill-assorted company came to the round-house, and passed within. 'Twas an unfriendly structure of old brick and stone. I cannot say what amenities were provided in the forward chamber for the refreshing of the watch. We were thrust into the detention hold. A stale smell insulted our nostrils. Stark stone was rough under foot; the walls were bare. A rough deal table held the center; long benches lined the walls. Narrow windows interposed bars between us and the moonlight. Sixpence to the watch brought us an exiguous farthing dip, which did little to dispel the gloom of the place. As if from far away came the rumble of coach-wheels and the cries of roysterers between taverns.

'Twas an uneasy place to spend the night, most like some antient tower in the wastes of Africa. As if it had been so, Abyssinian Bruce laid himself stoically down like an old campaigner. The rope-dancer paced like a tiger on his noiseless unshod feet. The mulatto woman sat and stared; her Lilliputian philosopher curled himself up like a dog in the corner. 'Twas our

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luck that we had the place to ourselves. I stared up at the full moon through the barred window.

"Unravel me this, Sir," said I to my learned friend, seated bolt upright on the bench. "If 'twas not the devil, who was it?"

"One of these," he replied softly. "One of these. Watch."

"Watch for what?"

"Let 'em smoulder, they'll smoak themselves," said he.

The staymaker's lodgers smouldered as the moon swung over the sky. The rope-dancer kept up his noiseless pacing. Hannah sat rigid, and muttered. Curled in his corner Pompey slept the sleep of childhood, and stretched on the bench the imperturbable explorer slept like a child too. My friend and I waked, and heard nothing. The moon was waning as Dr. Johnson leaned towards me and said in a loud whisper:

"'Tis tædious to wait, but soon now we'll have this murderer."

"How so?"

"Why, I can tell you how," boomed my friend with unnecessary loudness. "You must know, this knife-handle was of an exotick wood, which stains the hand. The stain deepens as time passes. This murderer will be caught, my friend, *red-handed*."

The rope-dancer resumed his steady pacing. Hannah swayed and muttered. Silence thickened.

A moment later my friend nudged me sharply, and I followed his gaze. Outlined against the narrow window was the mulatto woman. By the uncertain light of the moon she was staring intently at the palms of her hands.

"Never fear," said Dr. Johnson to me in his bull's mutter, "we'll be cleared before the face of the magistrate. Trust me, this murderer cannot escape. There's a diamond missing, d'ye see; I missed it from the lady's night-rail though Hannah did not. The murderer carries it on his person; and when he's searched, 'tis all up with him."

The rope-dancer stopped his pacing, and stood stock still. The mulatto woman stiffened. The Abyssinian traveller lay like the dead. Then the mulatto woman began to mutter between her teeth, angrily, without stopping. Pompey in his corner slept unstirring. Suddenly the woman's wrath fell upon the hapless page. She hauled him out from under the bench, and addressed her biting patois to him. The little page answered placatingly, but the woman was not to be placated. Words brought blows; she shook him till his teeth rattled, and then blows rained about his shoulders, till Dr. Johnson was fain to step between them.

"Nay, ma'am, enough," said he, shielding the hapless victim.

The woman gave over, and Pompey crept sobbing away from her under the bench. Gradually his sobs died away, and once more silence fell.

The rope-dancer tired of his pacing. Clutching his wild elf-locks in both hands, he sank to the bench beside

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Bruce. The traveller breathed heavily, and the rope-dancer bent over him, feeling his heart, before resuming his pacing. Suddenly Dr. Johnson spoke aloud.

"Mr. Bruce! Oblige me by handing me the diamond brooch which is in your left-hand waistcoat pocket."

Bruce came out of sleep standing up.

"I have taken no diamond brooch."

"Pray, Sir, don't quibble. The brooch is in your left-hand waistcoat pocket."

Bruce put up his heavy brows, and turned out the pocket. There was a flash of light in the moon as the diamond brooch fell to the stone floor.

"Sir," said Bruce steadily, "I give you my word of honour as a gentleman, I neither stabbed this unfortunate lady, nor stole her diamond brooch, which I now see for the first time."

"I believe you," cried I, "for 'tis clear this rope-dancer *planted* it on you, 'tis he that stabbed the lady for her jewels."

"Never believe it," said Bruce; "how did the poor man enter that triple-lock'd room and leave all locked again behind him?"

"Somebody did," said I, "that's plain to a demonstration."

"Why," says Dr. Johnson, "the rope-dancer did; he broke the window and turned the latch and so entered."

"I'll confess," cried the wretched rope-dancer. "I did indeed take the brooch — the lady was dead, she needed it no more, and my need was sore — but as God sees me," cried the rope-dancer, and sobbed, "I never laid a finger on her, for she was good to me in my need."

He sank to the bench, and sobbed.

For a space there was no noise but his heavy gasping. Bruce composed himself again to slumber. The mulatto woman sat in sullen silence. Once the door creaked on its hinges, and we thought the watch had come for us; but nothing appeared at the crack, and the door creaked to again.

Suddenly from without there was an outcry. The heavy shouting of the watch and their thudding footsteps changed into the sound of blows and screams of pain. Then the door jerked open, and the watchman shoved a small figure through the door in a heap. 'Twas Pompey. We had not seen his evasion, for he had slipped through noiselessly on his belly, most like some little reptile. He returned sobbing and cringing, and holding his head, which rang with the watchmen's blows.

My merciful friend picked up the small shaking form, and set him on his knee.

"Never cry, Pompey," said he.

"She beat me," sobbed Pompey.

"Never mind," said Dr. Sam: Johnson slowly; his long shapely fingers gently stroked the small brown cheek.

"And they beat me," added Pompey, and wept afresh.

"Be comforted," said Dr. Johnson. "Do thou stay by me, I'll tell thee a story. I'll tell thee of —"

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He seemed to cast about for some suitable narrative. Memory suggested his choice.

"I'll tell thee of Homer, as I promised," said he, and repeated some lines in Greek; the round-house rang with his sonorous voice.

I thought the little savage ever less likely to be entertained with Greek.

"Which is to say," said Dr. Johnson, "in the words of Alexander Pope:

"With shouts the Trojans, rushing from afar,
Proclaim their motions, and provoke the war:
So when inclement winters vex the plain
With piercing frosts, or thick-descending rain,
To warmer seas the cranes embodied fly,
With noise, and order, through the midway sky;
To pygmy nations wounds and death they bring,
And all the war descends upon the wing.

"But you are not to suppose," Dr. Johnson instructed his unlikely pupil, "that these bird-contests ever happened, for 'tis only a fable."

"Nay, Sir," struck in the Abyssinian traveller, "there you are out, for in Africa —"

"Tut, Sir, a crane's but a bird, even in Africa."

"In Africa, Sir —"

The door was pushed roughly open, and the watch were there.

"You must come along to Bow Street," said the leader.

"Not I," said Dr. Sam: Johnson, "but you may take the murderer."

His powerful arms clamped like a vise upon the tiny figure in his lap.

The metamorphosis was astounding. One moment the small figure was nestled trustingly and innocently against the great shoulder. The next, it was a small fury, writhing, scratching, and biting, and cursing steadily in a strong new voice, in patois, African, and surprisingly good English. Then the mulatto woman struck like a fury, and we had all we could do to hold her off.

"Do you mean to tell me," I demanded incredulously, "that that small child stabbed his mistress?"

We sat at breakfast at the Mitre Tavern. Hannah and Pompey had been committed to Newgate, and now 'twas time to refresh ourselves after the fatigues of the night. Sombre James Bruce ate sparingly of bread and cheese; the hungry rope-dancer stuffed himself with buttock of beef; Dr. Johnson called for a cut of cold veal pye, and ate with relish.

"'Tis no small child," said Dr. Johnson, "but a grown man, a very dangerous desperado cast in Lilliputian mould."

BOSWELL: "Yet his mother —"

JOHNSON: "For, Hannah is not his mother."

"Of that you may be sure," said Abyssinian Bruce, "for they are of different races."

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JOHNSON: "Hannah is his accomplice; and in all probability his mistress, for there is no human freak so freakish but he may find a woman to love him. They have confessed it, 'twas a deep-laid plot to come to England and be free; for 'tis known among the slaves, since the case of Sommersett three years since, that the slave is free the moment he sets foot on the free soil of England. So the new-bought slave-woman palms off her paramour as her child, and Mistress Winwood brings them hither. Now they will tarry with her only so long as will serve to prepare a refuge, and then steal the jewels and make off. Vigilance detected the first attempt —"

BOSWELL: "What part did the shuttlecock play?"

BRUCE: " 'Twas a sleepy charm; I have seen such things in my travels."

Johnson snapped his finger at the dawdling waiter, and more veal pye came on the run.

"So, Sir," said he, loading a mouthful, "a new plot was necessitated. Being unable to enter from without, Hannah bethought herself to hide her tiny accomplice in the lock'd room—"

BOSWELL: "Where? We searched the place."

JOHNSON: "We searched for a man. Had we been searching for a child, we would have looked in the coal-box, and found him."

BOSWELL: "What a risque!"

JOHNSON: "No risque at all, though he were caught there — simply another childish prank. He played his part well."

BOSWELL: " 'Twas a mad risque to make the attempt the very night we were to watch."

JOHNSON: "They did not know of it. The plan was concerted, by chance, in their absence, and carried out after the woman was withdrawn. Concealed in the coal-box, Pompey heard us affix the bolts; but he doubted not he could draw them easily enough, and so make off. The bolted-door mystification was no part of his scheam."

BOSWELL: "Yet what folly, to set so weak an arm to assassination."

JOHNSON: " 'Tis not so weak an arm, as I found when I tried to hold him. Nor was assassination intended; he was but to snatch the gems, and make off. But Mistress Winwood waked and screamed, and in pannick he silenced her. He had no time to unlock the triple locks; he must hide again. Then indeed was he in danger, had he been discovered; but he could do no other. Soon enough his accomplice's wit taught her how to carry the coal-box out of danger without being suspected."

BOSWELL (*thoughtfully*): "I made sure that the rope-dancer had done it by trickery. Say the scream was counterfeited, the lady but drugged within. Then the man who enters her smashed window in sight of witnesses may privily stab her before he opens the door and admits —"

The rope-dancer threw down the great bone he was gnawing, leaped to his shoeless feet, and hauled me up by the cravat:

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"Ha' done," he cried roughly, "or gentleman or no you'll fight me."

James Bruce pulled him down on the bench with one great hand.

"With me so close on your heels," said he calmly, "Dr. Johnson knew better. Pray, Dr. Johnson, how did you smoak Pompey's imposture?"

"Well, Sir," replied Dr. Johnson as I settled my ruffles and the rope-dancer glowered upon his bone, "as we sat in the round-house, I tried one trick and another to learn the truth. I put forth the fable of the knife that stains the hand; and Hannah must needs examine her hands. Then she had been handling the knife. 'Twas no fable that a gem was missing. When I said so, it brought confusion, for there was guilt in two hearts. Our friend here thought to get clear of the gem, thrust in his matted poll; I was watching, and I saw the attempt. Hannah thought her accomplice was seeking to cheat her of part of the swag, and swinged him soundly for it. When Hannah turned against him, Pompey thought best to take to his heels before anger brought betrayal. And 'twas thus he betrayed himself."

"How so?"

"I took pity on a beaten child, took him on my knee, and patted his cheek. There is no mistaking a man's cheek that has gone a day without the razor. At first my mind could scarce believe what my fingers told me. But I began to recollect what historians tell us: how Augustus had his dwarf, and Constantine had one no bigger than a partridge; Mark Antony had one under two feet in height, and Domitian assembled them by troops; Catherine de Medici bred the little creatures. Why not then a waiting dwarf in Mistress Winwood's household?"

"What erudition, Sir!" cried Bruce.

"Aye," said I slyly, "on the part of *The Universal Magazine*, whence all these ancient instances come."

" 'Twas then clear," went on Johnson, ignoring me with grandeur, "whose arm had the nerve for the deed, and whose frame was small enough to hide safely in a room we searched. I held him amused till the watch came; I assure you 'twas a strange experience, reciting Homer while I held a dangerous murderer on my knee."

" 'Twas an interposition of Providence," said the rope-dancer.

"Which found a learned instrument," said Abyssinian Bruce, bowing to my ingenious friend. "Yet in one thing, Dr. Johnson, you are out. Pompey is no freak of nature, but a member of the race of pygmies that inhabit the African forest. Whether they battle the cranes, I will not say; but had you listened, instead of shouting me down, you would have heard what report speaks of the race of the Wambutti, the African pygmy, a race stunted, but clever, adroit, and strong. Now, Sir, the Wambutti —"

"You, Sir," cried Dr. Johnson, cutting the discourse short, "may have heard travellers' tales of the pygmies; but *I*, Sir, (swelling) *I* am the man who caught one alive."

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Guy de Vry's "Vertigo" is one of the seven stories which won special awards in EQMM's Sixth Annual Contest. It is the story of a cold-blooded, professional killer — a murder-mercenary — who slays in broad daylight with utter contempt for the police; it is a story which reveals genuine talent, and we have every hope of publishing more of Mr. de Vry's work in the future . . .

When the author was at the tender age of two, his father invited a magician to dinner. For dessert, the magician hypnotized Guy de Vry's mother, and in the process scared the living eyeballs out of the two-year-old tyke. It is this experience of babyhood which, Guy de Vry thinks, explains why he took to writing.

His first book (unpublished) was written when Guy was twelve. The story contained a master criminal, a haunted house, and a formidable assortment of trap-doors and secret passageways — the ingredients of many a book written by considerably older authors. Guy's masterpiece, however, was abandoned when he couldn't find any way of saving his hero from a fate worse than death in Chapter 43.

Guy was graduated from high school in '37 after having, according to his own confession, ruined the school paper by writing a humor column for two years. The army snagged him in '42 and his wife collared him in '43. The army released him in '46, but his wife still has a stranglehold that Guy cannot, and doesn't want to, break. He started selling radio scripts in '44, and heard his work broadcast by such programs as "NBC University of the Air," "Radio Reader's Digest," and "Author's Playhouse." Before, during, and even after writing for radio, Guy also worked for a dental laboratory, a railroad, and a newspaper. In '49 he was given the Victor Frenkil Award by The Johns Hopkins University for the best television play of the year. Since then, his plays have appeared on Chevrolet Tele-Theatre and Cameo Theatre. Late in '50 he was invited to lecture at The Johns Hopkins University on the subject: "Writing for Television."

We have a hunch you will see Guy de Vry's prize-winning "first story" on television. The background would have been a problem in the earlier days of television — but now? Coney Island and a Ferris wheel — it's a cinch, even on an 8' x 10' television stage!

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VERTIGO

by GUY DE VRY

THEY CALLED HIM THE INCONspicuous Man . . . Mocatti and his crowd . . . and that was his main value. Mike Savitt, a thin, round-shouldered, spidery man with thick, black hair and a pasty complexion. You could pass him on the street and never notice him; you could rub shoulders with him and not give a second look. He was as drab as a mud fence and twice as uninteresting. His appearance could confuse even the staunchest witness.

Murder was merely a six-lettered word to Savitt. Murder paid well and made life exciting. It lifted him above the herd, made him conspicuous in action where he was inconspicuous in person.

Savitt had seen Kennedy only once, and then from a distance and from inside a moving car — a short, bird-like man who walked like an ostrich.

"He's in the way, Mike my boy." That's all Mocatti had said; it's all he needed to say. You didn't have to give reasons to a man like Savitt. The less he knew about his victims, the better he operated. You can't be efficient if a job becomes too personal. Kill with hatred and you'll make mistakes. Savitt never made a mistake.

The clock on the weathered building across the boardwalk read three thirty. Mocatti had arranged the appointment for four.

Savitt felt restless; inactivity made his nerves raw. He headed for the roller coaster, paid his admission, and took a seat in the second car. A short little man, wearing a tropical suit a size too small, climbed in beside him. He pulled the safety bar over and then carefully strapped on the safety belt. He glanced at Savitt shyly and smiled. Savitt looked the other way; the safety precautions disgusted him.

The chain tugged at the cars, pulling them up the steep grade.

"Well, this is it!" said the little man, laughing nervously. "At least we'll get a good view of Coney Island!"

Savitt looked over the side of the car. The man had been right — the view was good. Waves rushed into the beach, white heads lifted high, curving inward and then throwing themselves flat upon the wet sand. From this height, beach umbrellas looked like checkered sequins, and people like impersonal dots, small and insignificant. He felt that he could reach out and toss them aside with a flick of his thumb.

"Better hold tight," said the little man, gripping the safety bar. "We'll be over the hump in a minute!"

There was a sharp jolt and the car ahead of them dropped from view. Savitt looked up, seeing nothing but a huge expanse of blue sky; then the car dipped over the edge of the chute. He was lifted out of his seat; the

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metal bar struck him across the belly; air rushed out of his lungs and with an agonizing screech of metal upon metal, the car hurtled downward. They whipped around a curve, and he felt a sharp pain in his hip as he was slapped against the side of the car. His face was flushed; his hands trembled and there was even a tremor in his legs. The turbulence of the ride exhilarated him. He began to laugh as the violence animated him more and more.

"Faster!" he shouted. "Faster! Faster!"

The car catapulted around another curve; the wind rushed past his ears and his head snapped back as they went into another spectacular dive. He took a quick look at the little man beside him and the frightened face made him feel superior.

Savitt smiled. Other people only *played* at danger. How would Mr. Tropical Suit react if he told him he was a murderer?

A moment later they rolled through a tunnel, and into the straightaway, and the car stopped. The little man unfastened his belt, climbed out, and stood shakily on the platform.

"Some ride, huh?" he said, laughing without conviction.

Savitt loosened his tie, removed his coat, and strolled to the boardwalk. Two girls in shorts passed by. He could smell suntan lotion. One of them was chubby and he watched her hips. She turned and, seeing his eyes, nudged her friend; the second girl turned. They whispered and then laughed. As they walked away, the chubby girl added a deliberate swing to her hips.

For a moment, desire stimulated his mind. He touched his pocket and felt the hard metal of the knife.

It wouldn't be long now.

The clock on the dilapidated building read ten to four. Above a billboard advertising a popular whiskey he could see the top half of the Ferris wheel, a fragile circle against the sky, delicate as a child's toy. He headed towards it casually, scraping his feet, like a man bored with too much time. He stopped a few feet from the red-and-blue ticket booth. Several people passed by. No one looked at him.

At four o'clock exactly, Kennedy approached, carrying a leather briefcase. Savitt recognized him instantly. You couldn't mistake the ostrich walk and the tilted head.

"I'll get tickets," said Savitt, stepping between Kennedy and the booth. Kennedy looked up; his small, startled eyes seemed trapped behind the horn-rimmed glasses. "I'm Mike Savitt."

Kennedy said, "Oh," and shifted nervously from one foot to the other. They locked arms and Savitt led him up the ramp and to the platform.

"I wanna wide on the Fewwis wheel!" screeched a tiny little girl, her hair done up in curlers, and the tall, bony, angular woman with her pulled her out of earshot.

A young, red-headed attendant with a puckish, freckled face took the tickets. They waited for a blue car to halt.

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"I've got it in the brief-case," said Kennedy. He was ill at ease, and his tongue flicked over dry lips like a snake's. "No need to ride in this thing."

"I got instructions," said Savitt easily.

Kennedy looked away and laughed uncertainly.

"Haven't been on one of these since I was a kid," he said.

"I don't remember being a kid," said Savitt. Then he added, "Afraid?" and Kennedy didn't answer.

The blue car dropped into position, scraping against the platform like a knife blade on glass. They entered, and the attendant locked the door. He pushed a long lever, and the car began to move up and forward, vibrating slightly. Through the wire-mesh roof they could see the Ferris wheel looming above them like a tilted halo. There was a stale, musty smell in the car.

Kennedy fumbled with the strap buckle. He removed an envelope and handed it to Savitt.

"I can't understand it. Why didn't Mocatti pay you himself?"

"He had reasons," said Savitt, ripping open the glued flap and removing a packet of bills. He counted them slowly, wetting his finger after each flick of the bill, and then put the money into his pocket. This was a nice touch; Mocatti arranging it so that the victim paid off his own murderer. It appealed to Savitt.

Their car was nearing the top of the wheel, commanding a broad view of the beach, boardwalk, and bathing houses. A few feet below them a swinging car dipped to the farthest crescent of its swing, hung as if magnetized, then swished back out of view.

Kennedy ran a finger under the edge of his collar; sweat was giving a shine to his haggard face.

"Mocatti's a very suspicious guy," said Kennedy, breathing heavily, the words wheezing out as if he had been climbing an endless flight of stairs. "He doesn't trust anybody. Look at me: am I something to fear?" He spoke like a prisoner appealing to a judge. "I'd never talk. Not after all these years."

Now they were at the very top of the circle. It was a clear day and the ocean was a gray line along the sky. A large boat was moving into the harbor, looking like a paper cut-out with black cotton sticking out of its funnel.

"Savitt . . . tell me . . . why this stupid place for our meeting?"

"Ask Mocatti."

Kennedy made a face. "I never ask Mocatti anything. Do you?" Savitt didn't answer. "Look, Mocatti said you've got something for me."

"That's right," said Savitt. "I have."

He removed the knife from his pocket. It was large and clumsy. He flicked a button with his thumb and a five-inch blade snapped out, locking itself in place.

Kennedy said, "No," feebly, staring at the blade; it was reflecting light like a mirror. His mouth dropped open. He crushed himself against the

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back of the bench, holding the briefcase across his chest. He rocked his head from side to side; perspiration began to fog his glasses.

He moaned, "I should've known! I wanted to bring a gun! It made no sense — none of it!" He laughed hysterically. "I made two hundred bucks at the track yesterday. I didn't even blow myself to a steak." The briefcase fell from his hands. He pushed himself against the wall of the car as if it would absorb him, as if some secret process of osmosis would make him immune. He talked continuously now, feeling that conversation alone would keep him alive. Savitt began to feel revulsion; his romantic mind demanded that there should be nobility in death.

Kennedy muttered, "I paid my rent two weeks in advance." Savitt rose to his feet. "Who'll take care of the cat?"

Savitt raised his arm; this was the first time he was using a knife in broad daylight; he preferred an alleyway at night, with not even the pale shimmer of a moon; that way you don't have to see the face of your victim.

He plunged the knife forward, heard a moan, smelled camphor on the suit, felt the knife stopped by a bone, slide off, and then slip into the flesh. For a moment he clearly saw the undulating hips of the chubby girl on the boardwalk; he twisted the knife with pleasure; then Kennedy's glasses fell to the floor and Savitt saw the wide-open eyes. He leaned back quickly; blood was bubbling on Kennedy's lips; and then his legs buckled as if hinges had come loose and Kennedy tumbled to the bench in a heap.

A soft wind whistled through the mesh windows. From somewhere came the echo of a girl's shrill laugh. Savitt raised the body and propped it up on the bench. There was blood oozing through the shirt; he buttoned the dead man's coat, hiding it from view. He replaced the fallen eyeglasses, folded limp hands across stiff legs, and then waited for the car to land. He was almost sorry that it had been over so quickly. For once, he would have enjoyed a struggle.

"My friend is taking the ride again," said Savitt, stepping to the platform and closing the door of the blue car behind him. His manner was casual, unhurried.

The red-headed attendant looked up and Savitt slipped the additional fare into his hand. The boy walked towards the control lever, put his hand on it, and said, "Never been up in this thing myself," and then pushed the lever forward. Savitt kept his face averted, watching the blue car. "This is only my first season at Coney."

The Ferris wheel began to grind. The blue car vibrated uncertainly, then swung upward. Savitt smiled; everything was all right.

The kid watched the car ascending, shaking his head. "Beats me what your friend finds so fascinating about it!"

"Taste," said Savitt. "No accounting for it," and he walked away.

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It would take almost fifteen minutes before the car returned to the platform. Savitt felt elated, almost drunk. How simple it had been! Mocatti had been absolutely right. He had planned it well. All that remained now was the getaway, and that too had been taken care of. In a minute he'd be on Surf Avenue, in front of Feltman's restaurant, and then . . .

"Hey, mac!"

The voice struck him like a fist; he stiffened, feeling his skin tingle. He heard footsteps behind him. He tensed his muscles, ready to run if necessary. He turned carefully, and stared into the freckled face.

"You forgot somethin', mac."

The attendant handed him Kennedy's brief-case.

"Oh!" Savitt took it hastily. "It must've dropped from the car when I left. Thanks."

Then he saw the startled look on the kid's face. He glanced down. The kid was looking at his finger. There was a red stain on it.

"That's funny," said the kid, puzzled. "How did I get blood on my hands?"

For a long moment Savitt couldn't breathe. Then, quickly, he shifted the brief-case to his left hand, deliberately pricking his finger against the buckle. He held up his hand; a drop of blood oozed slowly out of a small gash.

"Guess you got it from me," he said, and walked off. His feeling of elation returned. That had been real smart. He'd have to tell Mocatti about *that!*

He went through Feltman's arcade, past the dart games and the fortune-telling booth. He could smell popcorn and hamburgers. He stopped by the merry-go-round. A few children were taking the ride, squealing happily as they reached out for metal rings. The time-worn calliope played an ancient waltz with lifeless precision.

"You *could* get away by subway, I suppose," Mocatti had said, sitting in his leather chair behind the ornate desk, lips a half-moon, eyes squinting under the pressure of his globular cheeks. "But why risk it? Be in front of Feltman's at four fifteen — on the dot. I'll have a black convertible ready to pick you up. Let's take every precaution against the unexpected. You do *your* part, Mike my boy, and I'll do mine!"

Savitt looked up and down Surf Avenue, but there wasn't any convertible. Traffic was light; a mounted policeman passed, galloping lazily in the afternoon sun. An old Ford chugged by, loaded down with beach chairs and a folding tent. But no convertible.

The merry-go-round stopped; a small, curly-headed youngster, with ice cream smeared over his face, shouted: "I wanna ride again! I wanna ride again!" and a fat woman in a two-piece sun-suit slapped him on the seat and said shrilly, "Yuh just wait 'till I get yuh home!" and the rest of her tirade was lost as the calliope began a raucous march.

It wasn't like Mocatti to slip up like this. Not without a reason.

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A clock with cracked glass hung across the street over the side-show. Garish posters announced: *Bobo, the Dog-Faced Boy; Helena, Half-Man, Half-Woman!* The time was now four twenty. What could have gone wrong?

Savitt turned, looking up, saw the Ferris wheel and then the blue car, climbing slowly towards the center of the circle. He still had a margin of safety.

A group of open phone booths, standing erect like gaping coffins, challenged him across the soda fountain. For a moment he stood, wavering between feelings of anger and resentment; another glance at the clock decided the next move for him.

He dialed Mocatti's number. There was no answer. He dialed again.

A police car scooted up Surf Avenue, siren wide open. From the booth, Mike could see people turning, craning their necks, asking excited questions. The police car turned up a side street, heading for the beach.

He slapped back the receiver and stepped out of the phone booth, not waiting for his dime to return. He looked towards the Ferris wheel. Through the arcade of the restaurant he could see the ticket booth. A group of people were bunched together. Someone was making wild gestures; everyone seemed excited. A woman pointed, and Savitt saw the red-haired attendant running to the crowd, followed by a policeman.

Savitt dug a fist into his pocket. How could he have been so stupid! There was more than *one* blue car on the Ferris wheel. He'd been watching the wrong one.

Two things became obvious at once: the body had been discovered, and Mocatti had never intended to send a convertible. It had been a simple ruse to delay him long enough so that escape was impossible.

With one plan Mocatti was eliminating two lives.

Savitt took a deep breath; he had walked into a trap as blindly as Kennedy. Worse; he hadn't even suspected. Sure, sure; *now* it was clear! Mocatti, the smart, shrewd operator; the guy with the influential friends; the man who had bought himself immunity for years. There were police commissioners and yes, even Senators whom he addressed by first name. The hoodlum who squealed didn't have a chance. Mocatti's word was respected; his alibis were always airtight; he paid yearly insurance for this type of protection, and he changed associates as often as he changed suits. This was Mocatti's way of giving an employee two weeks' notice!

Savitt felt better; at least now he knew where he stood. The Inconspicuous Man was on his own. That suited him fine. Mocatti would learn that Savitt was hardly a fool.

The subway station was three blocks away. He couldn't risk a taxi: too many drivers remember passengers, even the inconspicuous ones. If he could get to the subway before the police were organized . . .

Then he thought of something different — something dangerous, but

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almost brilliant. The police would receive a vague description from the red-haired kid; and they would be on the alert for a black-haired man in a blue suit. They would expect that this black-haired man was anxious to get away, and they would alert all the subway stations and bus lines.

Well, he'd outsmart them. He'd do just the opposite. They would never expect him to stay within the vicinity of the Ferris wheel. And as to the suit, there were ways in which that could be taken care of too.

He walked down Surf Avenue, away from Feltman's and the Ferris wheel, walking slowly as if strolling in the afternoon sun. He turned at the corner of Stillwell. You could enter the beach from here. He stooped, went under the boardwalk, feet sinking into the sand. A few couples were lying in the shadows, arms around each other. Somewhere a portable radio blared away; DiMaggio at bat.

Savitt took off his shirt. The sign on a pillar which read *Disrobing under the boardwalk or on the beach is not permitted* was an edict which everyone ignored. Savitt grinned. What's a little thing like that to a guy wanted for murder?

He took off his trousers, then wrapped the shirt around his waist, tying the sleeves into a knot. Only a section of his white shorts were showing, and unless you looked very carefully, they could pass as swimming trunks. He left the brief-case on the sand; if anyone noticed it, he could have forgotten it.

Savitt walked out on the sun-splashed beach. The heat of the afternoon had passed; a cool breeze was blowing in from the ocean and there was a general surging of activity.

He could hear the siren of another police car beyond the boardwalk.

A lanky boy leaped up into the air and caught a ball which a girl, a few feet away, had thrown. An elderly woman sat up abruptly, brushing sand from her face, and shook her fists.

"Don't you know ball playing is against the law?" she shouted.

"So who's bothering *you*?" said the boy defiantly.

The girl ran over and said, "I *told* you Jones Beach is better!" and then Savitt was out of earshot. Nothing had changed his status yet. Like always, no one paid the slightest attention to him.

Four girls pranced by with exaggerated walks; a dyed blonde was slipping a dress over her black bathing suit and a big-bellied man with a black, hairy chest watched her, forgetting to take a bite out of his hot dog; then Savitt found what he was looking for.

A middle-aged couple was sunning themselves on an army blanket, heads close together, listening to a portable radio. Bing Crosby was singing. Paper bags and thermos bottles lay at their feet, next to their clothing. The man was small, thin, and partially bald.

Savitt sat down and took out a pack of cigarettes. He didn't take out the matches. Making sure they could see

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him, he made a gesture of disgust and leaned forward.

"Could I borrow a light?" he asked. The man threw him a packet of matches. Savitt struck three, but the breeze was too strong.

"Lemme help you," said the man, sitting up on the blanket. "It's the only pack I got."

Savitt moved closer.

"Gimme that, will you, Ann?" said the man, and the woman passed him a dirty white towel. He handed it to Savitt. "Put it over your head. That'll do it."

Savitt returned the matches and puffed slowly.

"Sure's a nice day," he said. "How's the water?"

"Ask *her*," said the man. "I hadda sit here and watch our stuff."

The woman sat up, brushing sand from her arms.

"I'm gonna cool off again, Harry," she said, her voice high-pitched and sharp.

"Okay," said the man wearily.

"If you both wanna go," said Savitt, "I'll watch your stuff."

The woman looked at Savitt; apparently, the thin, bony figure she saw engendered trust.

"Thanks," she said, and smiled; her teeth were yellow and uneven. "You can listen to the radio if you want. We won't be long."

"Don't rush. I got lots o' time."

"Come on, Harry, I'll race you!"

He watched them run towards the water. Out of sight, he reached for the bundle of clothes. He found a pair of army pants and a dirty white polo shirt. He stood up, looking towards the edge of the beach. The couple was splashing around in the water.

Savitt slipped into the polo shirt and pulled on the army trousers. Off to one side, an elderly couple was playing cards. The man said, "So why don't you pick a card already?" and the woman laid down her hand and said, "Gin!"

The trousers were longer than he had expected; lying down, the man had looked smaller, but rolling up the cuffs took care of that. Savitt picked up his own clothes and went under the boardwalk. He transferred the money to the army pants, then dropped the blue suit under a pile of wet newspapers.

He walked back on Stillwell Avenue. There was a clam bar a block away from the Ferris wheel. It looked like a good place for information. The owner, a swarthy, heavy-set Italian, put a plate in front of Savitt and then shoved over a bottle of tabasco.

Another police car went screaming along Surf Avenue.

Savitt squeezed lemon on the clams and the Italian said, "Watch the sauce. It'll take a hunk outa your tongue." Then he looked over Savitt's shoulder and said, "Any new developments, Charlie?"

Savitt turned casually, munching a clam. The first thing he saw was a holstered gun, then the shiny badge and the blue uniform behind it. The policeman stepped forward, pushing back his cap. He glanced at Savitt,

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then put his stick on the counter.

"Got some water, Joe?" he said.

The Italian passed him a glass.

"They got the homicide boys on it now," said the cop. He had a strong, square face with prominent cheekbones. He drank the water. "The attendant remembered that the missing brief-case belonged to the dead guy. I guess he was killed for whatever was in it."

Joe leaned elbows on the counter and shook his head. "Some nerve *that* guy had," he said, almost with admiration. "Coney Island, of all places, and in broad daylight!"

"He won't get far," answered the cop. "We got a fair description. The blue suit, that'll give him away."

Savitt placed change on the counter, deliberately brushing the cop's arm, and saw him ignore it. He felt invincible. The whole island on the alert, looking for him, and here he stood, calm as could be, rubbing elbows with the police. He wanted to laugh.

He walked away. All you needed in this man's world was courage. As long as you don't get panicky, you're safe.

He passed by a Wax Museum. If they caught him, he'd probably be put on display here next season. *The Ferris Wheel Murderer! See the Monster in Action!* What a laugh!

Two policemen came around a corner, walking briskly, heading for the Ferris wheel. Savitt couldn't resist the temptation. He stepped back from the museum, getting into their way. They walked around him, and didn't even bother giving him a second look.

For a moment he was tempted to go directly to the Ferris wheel, show himself, and dare them to recognize him; but why overdo it?

He turned the corner of the street, thinking: those dumb cops will never know how close they came to getting themselves a promotion, when his shoulders collided with something soft and he said: "Sorry," looking up, and found himself staring into the face of the man from the beach.

For a moment both were too surprised to speak, and then the woman shouted, "Harry! We've found him!" and the man said: "Say, now listen, you . . ." and Savitt acting purely on impulse began to run.

He realized his mistake instantly. The woman screamed, "Help! Police!" People stopped, staring; out of the corner of his eye he saw a policeman, and then a hysterical voice yelled, "He must be the murderer!" and the policeman reached for his gun.

Savitt turned a corner and found himself on crowded Surf Avenue. He slowed to a fast walk, mixing with people wherever possible. Like an echo, his thoughts returned: *It's fear that beats people*, and his footsteps seemed to tap out *Fear! Fear! Fear!*

He looked behind him and there was the policeman, gun in hand, weaving through the crowd. He heard a voice shout, "Stop! Stop!" and then two shots rang out, fired into the air.

Some women screamed; several cars came to a screeching halt. A man threw himself flat on the sidewalk,

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glasses jumping off his nose. "In here — quick!" said a frightened girl, pulling her inquisitive boy friend into a bar. People melted into doorways; in a moment the street was deserted.

Savitt turned a corner and ran into a small, empty side street, leading to the beach. Up ahead, two policemen came towards him. There was a low fence across the street. Without a second thought, Savitt ran to it and sprang up. Only one hand gripped, and he hung there by two fingers. He kicked off his moccasins and, unmindful of splinters, pushed himself over the top, landing hard on the other side. He was breathing heavily, and there was a stabbing pain in his side.

He was within the enclosure of the roller coaster. The sound of voices leaped over the fence; then he heard the shrill blasts of more police whistles. Savitt was trapped, and only now he began to doubt his invincibility.

A sudden roar and screech made him look up and the red cars of the roller coaster thundered by overhead. He saw that he was only a few feet from the start of the run. A train was set into motion, sliding away from the platform and going towards the first steep incline. Again he heard whistles, and then hands appeared on top of the fence, followed by the familiar blue cap of the police.

Once more a feeling of violent exuberance went through Savitt. He'd show this crazy world! The first car caterpillared up the climb. The train was empty except for a young couple seated close together in the last car.

Savitt leaped, landing in the second car, striking his shoulder against the metal safety bar. He heard the familiar clicking of the chain as it tugged at the cars, felt the vibrations of the motor. The girl in the last car screamed. He clambered into the front car like an acrobat, ignoring her as people had always ignored him.

The train climbed higher and higher.

Savitt twisted around, looking down. Space dropped away on all sides; from this height everything looked like a miniature model, the kind he had often seen in the windows of travel bureaus.

He saw a group of upturned faces, several policemen among them. Now there was activity among the cluster below. He realized that they were trying to stop the mechanism. The car was almost at the top of the climb. He wondered whether they could see him from that distance. The train was bending over the edge of the chute.

With a wild cry of elation he pushed the metal safety bar forward and away and stood up, unhampered. He waved to the crowd below, defiance on his face.

And at that moment the car went into its first spectacular drop; the girl screamed again and turned away her face and Savitt saw the beach and the blue sky blend together in a crazy circular pattern whirling around like a Ferris wheel and then his body smashed against the pavement and his mind broke into splinters like a mirror and not a single image remained . . .

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It would be presumptuous on our part to write an editorial note about Percival Wilde's "The Way to Freedom" when the author himself has done the job so much more understandingly and perceptively. Here is Percival Wilde's own appraisal of his story, in mature retrospect:

"According to the biologists," says Mr. Wilde, "every cell in the human body is renewed at least once in every period of five years. If this is true, there can be little in common between the I who writes these lines in 1951 and the young author who wrote 'The Way to Freedom' more than a generation ago. I can even criticize that young author's output objectively, and I — the I of today — soberly consider 'The Way to Freedom' the best short story a man named Percival Wilde ever wrote.

"I hasten to tell you that I do not call 'The Way to Freedom' a good story, for it has faults which the I of today recognizes even if they escaped the I of yesterday; but I do say that if every writer has a single moment during which he writes better than he knows how, that moment crystallized for me in 'The Way to Freedom.'"

Mr. Wilde's best tale first appeared in "The Red Book Magazine," in October 1922, and subsequently was chosen for "Famous Stories" in England. It was reprinted in "The Golden Book," that memorable treasure-house, and was then included in ADVENTURES IN PROSE AND POETRY, *an excellent cloth-bound anthology on which high-school students have been cutting their literary teeth for the past couple of decades. The story has also been translated into most European languages (including the Scandinavian), being especially popular in all German-speaking countries. Indeed, from every point of view, here is a story which absolutely refuses to die on the vine of oblivion. . . .*

THE WAY TO FREEDOM

by PERCIVAL WILDE

THE TWO MEN HAD LITTLE IN common. Maynard gave the impression of being a prosperous business-man, Guthrie of being an underpaid subordinate in his employ. Maynard was well-dressed. From the clocked silk socks to the perfectly knotted tie, transfixed with a tastefully small

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scarf-pin, every detail proclaimed the thought and discrimination which had been expended upon its selection. Guthrie was cheaply dressed. His coat, of a cut fashionable years ago, was shiny at the elbows. His trousers, equally ancient, were baggy at the knees and innocent of crease.

The faces of the two men were as strikingly dissimilar as their garments. Maynard's features, mobile, expressive, clean-cut, radiated intelligence — and the habit of command. The deeply graved lines around Guthrie's mouth, the mild blue eyes, betokened stolidity, perhaps, and a lifetime spent in taking orders.

Yet when Maynard spoke, he addressed his remarks to "Mr. Guthrie"; and when Guthrie replied, he did not accord Maynard the dignity of a prefix. Stranger yet, the two were dining together, dining in a frowsy room attached to a fifth-class restaurant, and Guthrie had ordered for both while Maynard stared in moody silence.

The waiter spread a soiled tablecloth between them, pushed his way out through the battered door and returned an instant later with a fleet of chipped china dishes which he proceeded to deal out impartially. Then he left the oddly assorted pair alone.

Maynard examined the unappetizing assortment of lukewarm viands with disapproval.

"I — I don't think I can eat anything."

Guthrie smiled. Had he been a different kind of man, he might have replied: "It's a lot better than the food you'll get in prison." But Guthrie was not that sort. Sixty years of overflowing life had taught him patience; and long experience with men in Maynard's position had made him indulgent. If Maynard did not like the food, that was to be expected. Maynard had excellent reasons for being dissatisfied.

An hour ago he had been free, with every prospect of indefinitely continued liberty. The hue and cry which had been raised upon his disappearance five months ago had died away. Presently the search for him would be abandoned, and then, under another name, he might look forward to an undisturbed future. The world had been very rosy — an hour ago. Then, walking around a corner, spinning golden daydreams, he had marched straight into the arms of the one man he had seemed least likely to meet — and most dreaded meeting.

He should have foreseen it, groaned Maynard, as he watched Guthrie, now helping himself liberally. The least likely thing was always sure to happen. For five long months he had not stirred from the obscure boarding-house in which he had taken refuge at the end of his solitary flight. Posing as an invalid, he had stood five months of unutterable boredom; he might well have endured five months more, and have made himself secure beyond peradventure. The weather was to blame. The golden sunlight, the scented spring breezes, the shouts of romping children — all these had called to something deep below the

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surface, for Maynard was a young man. The chances of his being recognized here, five hundred miles from home, were remote. For the first time he had flung caution to the winds.

The thought of his stupidity made him writhe. Yet Maynard was not a stupid man. No stupid man could have doctored his books so cleverly; no stupid man could have prepared a false statement so convincing; no stupid man could have so accurately sensed the psychological moment to buy a ticket for New York, and then, unobserved, board a train which would carry him in the opposite direction.

According to the laws of probability, Maynard should never have been caught. And yet now he was breaking bread with the man who was presently to take him back for punishment.

"No wonder he kicks about the food," reflected Guthrie, and continued aloud between mouthfuls: "We'll get a better dinner than this when we get on the train."

"Um," commented Maynard ungraciously, "do we start tonight?"

"This afternoon," corrected Guthrie. "We leave on the four o'clock."

Maynard cast an appraising glance at his captor. Over sixty, tall, powerfully built, Guthrie would have presented no inconsiderable obstacle twenty years ago — even ten years ago. But age had weakened him; time had whittled down the sturdy muscles. The man who had captured Maynard was nothing but a shell of what he had once been, an antagonist hardly to be reckoned with seriously.

Violence itself Maynard dreaded. But with his freedom at stake he would stop at nothing, and his alert brain reviewed, one by one, the things which must come to pass before his captor could possibly turn him over to the authorities. They would be alone an afternoon and a night, perhaps longer. Surely within that time an opportunity would present itself. Maynard would be quick to seize it. He noted with satisfaction how slack the clothes hung on Guthrie's frame.

Impersonally, as if he were merely a spectator instead of the person most concerned, he compared his own physique with that of his captor, and estimated his chances in a hand-to-hand combat. On the score of weight he was at a good fifty pounds' disadvantage; but weight, without strength behind it, decided few battles, and Guthrie's once gigantic muscles were flabby. Maynard felt as sure of that as if his fingers were digging into the huge pulpy biceps. He himself was in the pink of condition. In the days before his hasty departure from home he had been one of the most active members of the country club. In the five months which had elapsed since, never a morning had passed without its setting-up exercises. Unutterably bored in his self-enforced seclusion, they had given him a half-hour's daily occupation.

He smiled contemptuously. The man proposed to guard him for five hundred miles! Why, the thing was impossible! Maynard was as good as

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free now. It was characteristic of him that he gave not the least thought to the weapons which Guthrie certainly carried. They need not be considered at all. He would choose a time when his captor would have to rely on his bare hands alone. His intelligence would discern the opening. Correctly chosen, there could be but one result. He fell upon his meal with a better appetite.

Guthrie smiled.

"That's right; make the best of it." From long experience he continued almost automatically: "You can never tell — you may be lucky when you get into court. The judge may let you off easy."

Court! Judge! Those two factors had had no place in his calculations. Punishment there was, to be sure, for such as were caught. But, Maynard would never be caught; that he had decided on the night that he had impulsively planned the crime. It could be done; it could be done safely, if cleverly enough. Cleverly! That thought had been his damnation. Had it been merely a question of lawbreaking, his instincts would never have permitted him to go wrong. But it had been a question of cleverness, a question of matching his wits against the wits of the creditors who would descend upon him in a swarm were they to get an inkling of the truth. And it had seemed, in those distant days, that his lie might pass without detection. Business was sure to get better. The bank, and the thin-lipped examiner who had checked his account, would never know how near he had been to destruction. If others had been pushed over the brink, reflected Maynard contemptuously, it had been their own fault. No such inglorious end for himself!

And then, somehow, business had failed to get better, and he had found it increasingly difficult to maintain his bold front. Collections were bad; checks were not coming in. Yet he was compelled to settle his own accounts promptly; any other course would have involved fatal admissions. He could conceal his lie only by living up to it, and each day made it harder. Slowly, relentlessly, inevitably, Maynard saw his downfall approaching. His principal competitor had given up the fight, had thrown himself on the mercy of his creditors, and was to be tided over. Bitterly Maynard reflected that had he not been so unnecessarily clever, he might have done the same thing. But his signature on the false statement had closed that avenue of relief. He was beyond the pale; for him there would be no assistance, nothing but a swift trial, disgrace, and years in prison.

With characteristic calm he had turned his intelligence upon that latter subject. After the exposure, could he escape punishment? He had thought so until he had walked into Guthrie's arms. Now, after having made sure of the weakness of his captor, he felt confident of it.

A harsh, raucous sound from Guthrie broke in on Maynard's ruminations.

"Water!" gasped the man. "Water!"

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His face had turned deathly pale; his huge form, suddenly risen to its full height, tottered drunkenly; his enormous hands clutched impotently at his throat.

Maynard jumped to the sideboard, and brought him a glass. Guthrie tried to drink.

"Heart's bad," he whispered, as his prisoner, too surprised to profit by his sudden advantage, eased him into a chair. "Some day — doctor told me — it's going to quit ticking — like a busted watch."

Somehow Maynard found himself overflowing with sympathy for his late enemy. He tore open the man's collar; flung up a rickety window.

"I'm going for a doctor!" he heard himself saying.

Guthrie did not appear to hear him.

"I'm going for a doctor," repeated Maynard, but before the words had passed his lips, he realized their futility. Guthrie had slumped to the floor, his arms spread wide, his head cocked at an impossible angle; and even as Maynard hesitated, the labored breathing ceased.

Guthrie was dead.

Living, Guthrie had represented the law — Maynard's enemy. Dying, all questions of enmity had momentarily disappeared; all else had been submerged in the thought of a common humanity. Dead, everything immediately reverted to its former status.

Had it been possible to help Guthrie, Maynard would have helped him, even at the cost of his own freedom: of that he was conscious, with a curious thrill. His own misfortune had suddenly become ridiculously small when compared with the greater misfortune which had befallen his captor. He had planned to fight the man, to injure him, if need be, with what consequences might follow. A higher power had taken the matter out of his hands, had struck more forcibly than ever he would have dared strike. In the presence of this superior force Maynard felt paralyzed. For an instant or two his usually alert brain refused to function.

Then, as if gears had suddenly slipped into mesh, he started out of his stupor and began to think — to think quickly and accurately. Flight was out of the question. They had been seen to enter the restaurant together. Were he to leave alone, not ten minutes would elapse before the beginning of the pursuit. Fallible humanity, he reflected shrewdly, was prone to believe the worst. Were he to run away, Guthrie's death would be laid at his door, and no amount of explanation could save him from this graver charge. Flight meant confession — confession of anything and everything.

But if he remained, his position would be hardly better. His version of the story might be accepted until an examination of the dead man's effects showed him to be an officer of the law, and further investigation disclosed Maynard as a fugitive from justice. He shuddered to think what

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might come after that discovery. He was guilty of one crime; the law would hold him capable of any other.

The hunted man stood at the door and dared not cross the threshold; yet something must be done, and that quickly.

The door opened suddenly. He wheeled. It was the waiter, bringing their coffee. On the instant Maynard's resolution was taken.

"Send for the police!" he commanded gruffly, and slammed the door in the waiter's face.

He smiled as the footsteps died out along the uncarpeted corridor. The solution, the logical solution, the only possible solution, had come to him as in a flash of lightning. Five hundred miles from home, Guthrie might be as unknown here as Maynard himself. There was a chance, the slimmest chance, but better than no chance at all.

Swiftly he bent over the dead man, and emptied his pockets. Swiftly he exchanged their contents with his own. He sighed with satisfaction as in a trousers pocket he found the object he most sought, the little gold shield which identified the bearer.

Hardly had he finished when the door burst open.

Maynard exhibited the shield with a composure which he was far from feeling.

"I'm Guthrie, from Madison," he explained. "I arrested this man an hour ago. He's dropped dead."

He had not expected his story to be accepted so unquestioningly.

The police officer nodded as calmly as if prisoners were in the habit of dropping dead every hour.

"Arrested him here?" he asked.

"Yes," said Maynard, "bumped into him on the street. Wasn't looking for him, but recognized him. He's wanted back home." He added a subtly convincing touch, admiring his own cleverness as he did so: "There's a reward out for him."

"Well," said the officer philosophically, "you'll get the reward anyhow, and you won't have the trouble of taking him back." He scanned the dead man's face curiously. "No spring chicken, is he? Guess he's given the police enough trouble in his time."

Somehow Maynard felt unable to join him in the libel.

The police officer turned to him with interest.

"So you're Guthrie? We've been expecting you."

Maynard's heart sank. He thought it best to answer with a noncommittal, "Yes?"

The officer nodded.

"We've got the man safe under lock and key, waiting for you to come with the warrant. And I don't mind saying," he added emphatically, "that we'll be mighty glad to get rid of him. We've had some tough customers in this little town, but not many to touch this bird."

Had Maynard not been so quick-witted, he might have made an incautious remark, or asked a suspicious question. This was news to him. Guthrie had evidently been sent here on a

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mission. Were he to admit his ignorance of it, his promising plan would crash to defeat.

It struck him that the papers which he had removed from the detective's pocket must explain everything. He pulled out the sheaf, and leafed through it with elaborate nonchalance. If this yielded the necessary information, all might yet be well. A large, official-looking envelope seemed promising. He opened it.

"That's right," said the police officer, taking the single document it contained from his hands, " 'original warrant of extradition.' You can't serve it any too soon to suit us."

Everything became clear to Maynard in an instant. The man whose place he had taken had been sent here to take charge of an extradited prisoner. Nothing remained for him, the impostor, but to play the rôle through to the finish. He would accept custody of the man, and escort him out of the city. Once safe from pursuit, he would turn him loose, and resume his own interrupted flight. He had made one disastrous mistake; he was too clever to make a second. Freedom awaited him. Once again the future looked bright.

Yet a sudden thought came to him before he left the room. Guthrie had not quailed at the thought of guarding not one, but two able-bodied prisoners during a five-hundred-mile trip!

A wholly involuntary phrase of admiration for the lion-hearted old man came to his lips: "By George, he certainly had nerve!"

The police officer caught his glance and smiled.

"Wait till you see Toselli," he suggested. "You'll need still more of it!"

It was too easy. In fact, when a clever man applies his wits to the task of circumventing others of lesser intelligence, it often is too easy. Sometimes forces which no man is clever enough to reckon with take a hand in the game. But Maynard wasted no time in speculating on such remote possibilities.

His story was accepted without suspicion. The dead man, he explained to the local authorities, was one Maynard, a fugitive from justice. He gave cautious details, carefully avoiding too much amplification. It had been a matter of juggling books, he informed them; now the man had gone where such books as were kept might not be juggled with. The account was closed. And while his lips formed the words, his acutely active intelligence made careful note that Maynard, the fugitive, was now officially dead and the pursuit at an end. Tomorrow the man who passed for Guthrie would disappear, as also would the prisoner who had been confided to his keeping. That occurrence would make his position still more secure. The authorities would shake their heads, and perhaps admit their unwisdom in having sent an old man upon so dangerous a mission. The prisoner, if recaptured subsequently, would be charged with an additional crime. But the Maynard case would be closed once and for all.

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Fate, with a little judicious assistance from himself, was playing nicely into his hands.

The men at headquarters finished making an official record of the facts as he supplied them. "And now," they said, "we're going to turn your man over to you."

They led him to a small white-washed cell.

"This," they explained, "is Toselli."

Maynard peered through the bars. The prisoner, even at first sight, justified everything that had been said about him. A short, squat body, arms that were ape-like in their reach, legs that were bowed and ungainly, and the whole surmounted by a cropped, bullet-shaped head, carrying a pair of small, malevolent eyes.

"Well," inquired his escort, "how would you like to meet him on a dark night?"

Maynard shuddered. Impersonally he had always been aware that there existed such as Toselli. This was his first meeting with an exemplar in the flesh.

"Not keen about him, Guthrie?"

"I've handled worse than that," said Maynard, feeling some such remark called for. "I'm not afraid of him."

As he spoke, the prisoner lurched heavily to his feet, and approached the bars. Maynard sensed rather than saw the ape-like muscles rippling under the filthy clothing. With a curious thrill of horror he became aware that the man was silently appraising him, estimating his chances in a hand-to-hand combat, much as he, an hour previously, had estimated his own chances in hand-to-hand combat with Guthrie.

The movement was not lost on Maynard's companions.

"He's sizing you up, the devil! That's what he's doing."

The man grinned, showing his fangs.

A detective flung open the door of the cell.

"Here — come out where we can look at you!" he commanded the prisoner gruffly.

Toselli, with the docility of a well-trained gorilla, shuffled silently into the corridor. Maynard felt the man's silence getting on his nerves. If he would only speak! If he would only show some small semblance of humanity!

Maynard towered above his prisoner by more than six inches. In his hip pocket he felt the comforting weight of Guthrie's revolver. And for the first time in many months he had the sudden and sustaining feeling that the law was on his side.

With wholly unnecessary violence he seized the prisoner's right hand, repressing an involuntary shudder as his fingers closed on the scaly flesh. With a second abrupt movement he drew Guthrie's handcuffs from his pocket and clamped himself and his prisoner together.

"There!" he panted, and was surprised to find that his voice had a strange convincing quality. "I guess that'll hold him!"

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For answer Toselli looked into his face and grinned.

The last word of the men who had turned the prisoner over to him was: "Remember, he's dangerous. If he tries to get away, don't take a chance; shoot!"

Maynard smiled. The prisoner would get away, and there would be no shooting. At an opportune moment he would unlock the handcuffs. Then there would be a double escape.

They were crossing the street. He looked up to see a heavily loaded truck bearing down upon him. He moved in his prisoner's direction to escape it, and felt the arm to which he had handcuffed his own suddenly turn to steel, and thrust him violently into the path of the onrushing danger. With a gasp he flung his entire weight on his prisoner, carried him bodily off his feet, and gained the safety of the sidewalk by a fraction of a second.

"You swine! You unutterable swine!" he cried.

The criminal looked up at him silently and grinned.

If he could only tell the man that he was not an enemy but a friend! Yet for many reasons he dared not. If he could only rid himself of his dangerous charge, turn the man loose! For the time being, it was out of the question. Street urchins, spying the handcuffs, were accompanying them in chattering groups. Pedestrians, catching the glint of the nickeled chain, were turning to stare at them curiously. Once alone, the thing might be possible. Maynard hastened toward the railway station.

In the waiting-room he seated himself on a long bench, and dragged his prisoner to a seat at his side. His train would not arrive for half an hour. Much could happen in that time. Originally he had planned not to release the man until far from the city. Now he changed his plan. He desired nothing so much as to be relieved of his unwelcome companion at once. He shuddered as the scaly hand rasped against his own.

He, Maynard, was a criminal. The law which he had violated proclaimed him one. The other man was a criminal too, and Maynard became conscious of acute resentment at a classification broad enough to include them both. Alike fugitives from justice, alike malefactors against whom society had banded itself together, they should have had much in common. The thought flitted through Maynard's mind, and left behind it nothing but a sense of revolt. He would have reached for the key of the handcuffs at once had not the station been too crowded.

What had the man done? The papers which he had removed from Guthrie's pockets would tell the story. He leafed through them. A clipping from a newspaper contained the details of the crime. He began to read.

It had happened on a winter's night. There had been no question of robbery; malice had been the sole motive. For an affront, fancied or real, the man had broken his way through

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the window of the lonely cottage. His employer's wife lay asleep, her child in her arms. And the man, armed with a hatchet —

The account was made vivid with pictures of the victims.

Maynard suddenly felt sick. Almost without thinking, his hand leaped for the key which would rid himself of the foul thing at his side. He had placed it in the lock, when he heard the swish of a skirt. It was a woman with a child, passengers like himself, hurrying to catch an earlier train. The woman was young; the child was laughing. It suddenly flashed through Maynard's mind that were he to turn the key, these two might be the next victims of the monster. Abruptly he tore it out of the lock and bent his head into his hands.

"My God! Oh, my God!" whispered Maynard.

When they had taken their seats in the train, the murderer shook the chain, pointed to the handcuffs suggestively, and grinned. Maynard knew what that meant. As clearly as if he were speaking the actual words, the man was saying: "Take them off!" Maynard turned his back in horror.

"Take them off!" Half an hour ago he had been looking forward to the moment when he might. Freedom for himself was not to be achieved without freedom for his prisoner. So easy in prospect, it had become difficult in reality.

"Take them off!" Freedom for himself, of course, but freedom too, for the monster. Freedom for that fearful power for evil which the horrible shape at his side represented. Across the aisle unsuspecting passengers were settling themselves comfortably. Humanity! Humanity in the mass! And the thing shackled to his wrist was but biding its time to prey upon it!

For the law itself Maynard felt contempt. He had broken it. He had felt sure that it could be broken with impunity. But for those simpler laws which went down into the origin of man's being, the laws which proclaimed, "Thou shalt not kill!" he was conscious of intuitive respect. He had never thought much about them. It had never occurred to him that he might one day be brought into conflict with them. Yet chance had placed it in his power to kill just as surely as if his own hand wielded the weapon. If he liberated the thing that tugged suggestively at his wrist, and if the inevitable happened, would he not be equally guilty? Would he not be more guilty? His was the intelligence to foresee. What if the nightmare possibilities which raced through his brain were to become ghastly actualities? Would not the responsibility be his?

By no process of reasoning was it to be avoided. Still, it must be avoided. He was running his head into a noose. The train was carrying him back to the place from which he had fled. It was reducing at the rate of forty to an hour the precious miles which he had interposed between himself and his pursuers. Chance had undone the nearly fatal consequences of his first

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blunder; was he to blunder a second time?

"No!" breathed Maynard. "No!"

He must accomplish the impossible: the prisoner must be delivered to the authorities, and he must make good his own escape. It occurred to him that he might chain the killer to the seat, and so leave him. Soberer second thought told him that the plan was hopeless. Once the handcuffs were opened, the man would never permit them to be closed again. Already he suspected something. Why had his captor placed the key in the lock? Having gone so far, why had he not turned it? The ferret-like mind was shrewdly groping for an explanation.

It suddenly came to Maynard that his prisoner might be as quick-witted as himself. He glanced into the crafty eyes. The look that he received in return was almost friendly.

As the train slowed down and slithered to a halt at a station, the man rose nonchalantly and jerked his head in eloquent suggestion that they alight here. With a violence of which he would have thought himself incapable, Maynard leaped at his prisoner and flung him back into his seat. Had the man read his thoughts? Here Maynard had hoped the two might leave the train; here, undisturbed by prying eyes, he had hoped to turn the key in the lock. Yet a single glance through the window at the pretty little cottages, the orderly white streets, the rustic, ivy-clad church in the background, had totally unnerved him. It was for him to say whether tragedy and death were to be loosed upon the unsuspecting community; only by doing so might he regain his freedom. But was freedom itself acceptable upon such terms? Liberty, absence of restraint, the right to come and go as one pleased — what was it all worth if it meant that he could never again take up a newspaper without dreading the news it might bring him? From his human pursuers he might make himself secure; but the news of the revolting deed for which he might make himself responsible would pursue him to the very end of the world.

His prisoner sat hunched at his side, drilling him through with malignant eyes. He had not spoken yet. It was not necessary. The eyes spoke volumes. Here was bewilderment turned to suspicion; and suspicion turned to certainty; and certainty turned again to suspicion; and suspicion swollen into soul-scorching, soul-blistering hate.

The momentary struggle between the men had attracted the attention of other passengers. As the train started, an inquisitive traveling salesman rose and came nearer to inspect the prisoner.

"What's he done?" he asked genially.

"Murder," answered Maynard shortly.

The traveling salesman's geniality evaporated, and he moved away abruptly.

Maynard, watching out of the cor-

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ner of his eye, saw him imparting his knowledge to other passengers.

"No, there's no danger," he could hear him saying; "he's got him handcuffed."

Quite unconsciously Maynard squared his shoulders. Here was a new rôle for him! Maynard, the fugitive from society's justice, become Maynard, the protector of society!

Presently nervous travelers, in groups of two and three, found pretexts to wander to his end of the car, there to favor the two men with an impartial scrutiny.

He could overhear some of their remarks.

"See: they're handcuffed together!"

"He's a murderer. The man said so."

"Wonder what he'd do if he got loose!"

An engaging young woman, towing an anxious father, surveyed them with interest.

"Which one's the murderer?" she inquired.

Maynard might have laughed had not that been the precise question he had been asking himself. Oddly enough, he could see nothing humorous in it.

The young woman, having been duly enlightened by her parent, favored captor and captive alike with a radiant smile and tripped on. The father, passing Maynard, nodded to him affably. Curious, he reflected, how all his fellow-passengers had suddenly come to regard him as a friend! He was conscious of no reciprocal sentiment. Social conventions, as crystallized in certain laws, had made him an outcast. He felt little affection for them. By the merest chance the handcuffs were fastened to his left wrist instead of to his right. Had Guthrie lived, things would have been otherwise. For an insane instant he regretted that Guthrie had not lived; it would have made everything so much easier. Guthrie, the physical enemy, could have been outwitted — but now that something deep in Maynard's soul questioned and questioned and would not be satisfied.

He fell to counting the mileposts as they flashed by. With each his security lessened. With each the probability that he would be recognized by some new passenger increased. Quite impersonally he began to wonder just when that would happen.

Darkness fell. The train rushed on.

They spent the night sitting bolt upright in the day coach. They had eaten nothing since they boarded the train. Guthrie would have taken a prisoner into the dining car for an evening meal. Maynard thought of it, and dismissed the thought. The opportunity for escape while crossing the swaying platforms was too obvious. A sudden push, an overwhelming strain on the slender links which bound them together, and freedom! Such an accident would take the responsibility from his shoulders, but not if he could foresee the accident, not if he should deliberately court such an accident.

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During the night the coach gradually emptied. At each stop sleepy passengers nodded farewell to Maynard, and disembarked. Morning came as the train neared their destination, and but for a few scattered travelers dozing in distant seats Maynard and his companion had the car to themselves.

It was then that Toselli spoke. He leaned toward Maynard and whispered the words into his ear:

"You — no Gut'rie!"

Maynard was too weary to feel surprised.

"No," he admitted candidly, "I'm not Guthrie."

The murderer grinned.

"Then why you say you Gut'rie, eh?"

Maynard's thoughts went crashing back to the scene at the jail. The detectives had addressed him by the name of the dead man. The prisoner had started. He had not noticed it — then.

He waited for the man to continue.

"Gut'rie — he arres' me — five year ago. I know Gut'rie!"

"Well, what of that?" Maynard heard himself saying.

The man leered into his eyes.

"Mebbe you keel Gut'rie, what?"

Maynard felt that it was quite useless to reply.

"Mebbe you keel Gut'rie," pursued Toselli insistently. "All ri'. I no tell eef you le' me go."

"I'm not going to let you go," said Maynard very quietly.

"You taka me back, an' they arres' you!" threatened the man. "I tell!"

"So you would," smiled Maynard. "Yes, of course, that would be what you'd do."

The murderer leaned toward him menacingly.

"Le' me go!" he snarled.

Maynard closed his eyes wearily. That problem he had solved for himself during the long hours of the sleepless night.

"No," he said; and then, more positively: "No, Toselli."

He yawned, carelessly raising his manacled hand to his mouth. That action might well have been his last. In a flash the Italian's right hand darted over his head, dragging the chain mercilessly across his throat; and his free hand, seizing Maynard's shackled wrist, drew the chain tighter and tighter. Maynard struck out blindly. It was useless. The demon was at his back, strangling him to death. With bursting lungs, with protruding eyes and tongue, Maynard staggered to his feet, bearing the whole weight of his assailant, and with a supreme effort flung the entire ghastly burden over his head.

The man struck the floor with a hard thump which stunned him momentarily. Then he rose cat-like to his feet, jerked open the door, and leaped from the moving platform.

Maynard, filling his aching lungs with air, stood for an instant stupidly regarding the broken chain which dangled from his wrist. Then, so quickly that the dozing travelers in the distant seats never quite understood what had happened, he, too, ran

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to the door of the car and leaped after the fugitive.

A curious procession moved up the principal street of Madison. It was headed by what might have been a man, and might also have been a gorilla, and visibly partook of the characteristics of each. Battered to a pulp, both eyes blackened, spitting out teeth, the thing sobbed and begged for mercy as it stumbled along. Its arms swung helplessly at its sides, and on one of the wrists glittered the broken half of a pair of handcuffs.

Behind the creature, pushing it ahead whenever it faltered, came a man. His coat was split, his collar gone, his face torn and bleeding, and quite unrecognizable for the coal-dust and cinders ground into it.

Yet there was something impressive about the man, something which made the growing crowd which escorted him give him plenty of room. Perhaps it was the odd set of his jaws; perhaps it was the strange light that radiated from his eyes; perhaps it was the fact that the other half of the broken handcuffs dangled from his own wrist.

Without slackening his deliberate pace, without glancing to the right or to the left, Maynard marched the prisoner into the police station.

"This is Toselli," he said. Half a dozen hands at once laid hold of the murderer.

Maynard glanced at the curious crowd which had pressed into the little room with him. He could have called man after man by name; yet in no eyes could he discover an answering gleam of recognition, so effectually had the cinders and coal-dust disguised him. Even in that instant he noted that he was unidentified, that the way to freedom still lay open.

Yet he turned contentedly to the man behind the desk, saying:

"You might as well arrest me too; I'm Maynard, the thief."

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and other stories by *P. G. Wodehouse*, *Karl Detzer*, *Harry Kemelman*, *L. J. Beeston*, *E. G. Ashton*, and another *EQMM* "First," by *Sam Young*.

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Billy Rose, the "Bantam Barnum"— song writer, night-club entrepreneur, Broadway producer, and newspaper columnist . . . Billy Rose who works at least 14 hours a day . . . whose only exercise is a brisk walk to the dining room . . . Billy Rose, the man with the seven-track mind . . . one of the most dynamic personalities in show business today . . .

D. O. A.

by BILLY ROSE

THE other night at a java and johnnycake joint on Sixth Avenue I ran into a reporter friend of mine named Sam Becker.

"Your body and by-line have been missing for a couple of weeks," I said. "What cave have you been hiding in?"

"Cave 1106 at the Hotel Statler in Boston," said Sam.

"Big story?"

"Strange would be a better word," said the reporter, "but unfortunately I can't use the yarn because I can't prove some of the facts."

"Maybe it would help you to talk about it," I suggested. "Try it for about 800 words."

"Well," Sam said, "three weeks ago at 11 P.M., a man was seen rushing off Pier 90, screaming and waving his arms like crazy. As he was high-tailing it across the street, a truck swiped him, and when the ambulance came, he was marked D. O. A. — Dead On Arrival.

"Except for the guy's hysterics, it looked like a routine accident and the cops handled it accordingly. At the morgue they went through his pockets and found a key to a mid-town hotel room, two crumpled Dixie cups, about $80 in money, and a Massachusetts driver's license issued to Charles Fitzgerald of Boston.

"A check at the hotel showed that a Mr. and Mrs. Fitzgerald had arrived two days before, and that Mrs. F. had been scheduled to sail for Europe that night from the same pier where her husband was killed. The only other clue was a telegram from a Dr. Shelley in Boston which had arrived a few minutes after the couple left for the boat, but it merely referred to the state of Mrs. Fitzgerald's health.

"After a call to the steamship line had verified that the lady was actually on board, the police got her on the radio-telephone and told her the news. Mrs. Fitzgerald seemed pretty broken up about it, and said she couldn't even guess at any reason for her husband's peculiar behavior.

"Five days later Mrs. F. flew back from Cherbourg to do the right and proper by the corpse, and then went on to Boston. That finished the case

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— as far as the cops were concerned, it was the same old story of Man Meets Truck.

"But, somehow, the thing didn't add up to me. Proper Bostonian kisses wife goodby, watches liner pull out, suddenly yipes like a hurt spaniel, and lights out for parts unknown. How come?

"I put it up to my editor, and he agreed to let me go to Boston and do a little shovel work. There, I did a lot of talking with the medico who had sent the telegram, with the Fitzgeralds' neighbors, and with Mrs. F. herself. I'm pretty certain I've got the answer, but as I said, I can't print it because I can't prove it. . . .

"According to the neighbors, Charles Fitzgerald wasn't the proper Bostonian he pretended to be. He had married his wife for her dough, and ever since the nuptials he had been spending most of his afternoons playing bridge for big stakes, and most of his nights playing the field. Mrs. F., on the other hand, was one of those frail, long-suffering females who never protest in words but let it all come out in symptoms. She was a hypochondriac of the worst sort, and it was at Doc Shelley's suggestion that she had sailed for France — he told her she needed more sun, but admitted to me that what she really needed was less husband.

"So far, Billy, I've given you facts, but from here on it's guesswork. It's my theory that it was the ocean voyage which gave Fitzgerald his big idea — to murder his wife and take over her estate. He planned what he thought was the perfect crime and, with the doctor's help, here's how I reconstructed it:

"Mrs. Fitzgerald, a chronic insomniac, used a lot of sleeping pills over a course of days or weeks. Fitzgerald managed to sneak a dozen of them out of her pill-box. The night of the sailing — to cover up — he wired the doctor that he was worried about the amount of sedatives his wife was using, and asked for his advice. Then he went on board with the murder weapons — a bottle of Scotch and two paper cups. He knew his wife hated alcohol, but he figured he could get her to take a drink because of the special occasion.

"It's my belief that in one of those paper cups was the powder from enough sleeping tablets to kill Joe Louis. As Fitzgerald had doped it out, his wife's body wouldn't be discovered until the following morning, and then it would be assumed she had either committed suicide or taken too many tablets by mistake.

"At this moment, X — the thing a murderer seldom makes provision for — went to work. Mrs. Fitzgerald, as she admitted to me, waited for the moment when her husband's back was turned and then, not wanting the Scotch, poured the contents of her cup into Mr. F.'s and pretended to bottoms-up. When Fitzgerald downed his drink, he was probably surprised at the amount he had poured for himself, but it didn't seem important at the time.

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"If my guesswork is in gear, he then kissed his helpmeet ardently and left her cabin, first stuffing the one bit of evidence — the Dixie cups — into his pocket.

"While waiting on the pier for the boat to pull out, he looked at the telltale cups and noticed there wasn't any lipstick on the one with traces of undissolved powder at the bottom. Suddenly it crossed his mind that his wife must have done what he had seen her do so often at parties — dumped her unwanted drink into his. Screaming for help, he ran out into the street and then the truck clipped him. . . ."

"Simple justice," I said. "The truck killed a no-good guy who was going to die anyhow."

"No," said the reporter, "the truck is entitled to full credit, and Fitzgerald would be alive today if the doctor's telegram had reached him in time. You see, the message which started me on this wild goose chase read:

"NO CAUSE FOR ALARM. MRS. FITZGERALD'S INSOMNIA PURELY PSYCHOLOGICAL. SLEEPING TABLETS NOTHING BUT SUGAR."

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We are extremely happy to welcome Kem Bennett to the pages of EQMM. Mr. Bennett is a rising young British author who has already made a considerable splash in American magazines. Although still in his early thirties, Kem Bennett has led a remarkably adventurous life — the kind of life that is admirably suited to become the background of a prolific writing career. He has traveled extensively — since boyhood — and has served seven years in His Majesty's forces. His record is sparkling: A.A. gunner; infantry officer in Duke of Wellington's regiment; tank duty; trained in Egypt and Palestine for service in Greece; parachuted twice into France, and promoted to Major; ambushed and wounded by German machine guns; landed in Denmark with Danforce, a Danish resistance army . . . Kem Bennett knows his stuff!

We hope to have other stories by Mr. Bennett, and if and when we do, we shall tell you more about the man — especially about his likes and dislikes, which are fascinating . . .

LET FREEDOM RING

by KEM BENNETT

WALKING HOME WITH HIS HAT tipped slightly backwards on his head, Doctor Richard Buchanan was quite at peace with the world. He had dined on oysters, Boeuf Bourguignon, flageolet beans, a salad and Brie cheese, washed down with a Meursault, a Romanee Conti, and Taylor's 1927 port. A knowledge of dietetics told him that boiled cod, boiled potatoes, and raw cabbage should have produced an equivalent feeling of well-being. Without hesitation, he consigned dietetics to limbo.

In Deanery Street, which is the respectable dog's hind-leg of an alleyway running between South Audley Street and London's Park Lane, a derelict sitting in a doorway stuck out a leg and tripped him up. As he rose from the pavement clutching a sore knee, he was aggravated.

"What the devil —" he said. The guilty leg stuck out stiffly across the pavement. "What the devil do you think you're doing?"

He limped back to the leg and stirred it with his foot. "Do you think it's a sensible thing to trip people up . . ."

A flaccid yielding on the part of the leg made him frown. He bent, taking a lighter from his pocket. When the flame lit up the features of the man in the doorway he stared with suddenly narrowed eyes. . . . Derelict? Derelict be blowed! It was General Sir Basil Sandeman. News pictures

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passed before Richard Buchanan's mind's eye: Sandeman receiving one of his many decorations from the King — reviewing troops in Germany — talking with General Eisenhower — General Sir Basil Sandeman in Guards' uniform, looking tall and soldierly, yet human and humorous, at some Royal function.

He reached forward and touched the head. It lolled forward, swung sideways once, and then became still, with the chin on the breast. The movement revealed the handle of a knife standing erect beside the right ear.

With the certainty of a man who knows death as a familiar, Richard straightened his back. No need to feel for a pulse. No purpose in trying to undo what had been so skillfully and so murderously done. It was over. The great soldier was dead in a gutter — no more reviews, no more friendships with Kings and Princes, no more service in the cause of England. The knife had been driven far downwards into the little cup behind the collar bone. It had severed the subclavian artery. Sandeman would have died within ninety seconds of being struck.

A white card was protruding from the soldier's breast pocket. Doctor Buchanan had read detective stories. He took it out carefully, holding the pasteboard by the edges.

It read:

LET FREEDOM RING!
ONE LESS TO THREATEN
THE WORLD OF MEN.

He drew a deep breath of sorrow and disgust. Another one! Seven — or was it eight? No, seven — seven times he had read in the paper of sudden, brutal deaths, all within the year. Seven of the country's leaders! It was a dirty, beastly business. It stank to high heaven of madness; or, possibly, of filthy political assassination.

Sickened, Richard stepped backwards on the pavement and shouted, "Police!" Then he put two fingers in his mouth and whistled an ear-splitting, sleep-destroying whistle.

The police car waited patiently outside Savile Row police station. Chief Inspector Stott came down the steps beside Richard and gestured towards it.

"Drive you home, Doctor?"

It was four o'clock in the morning. The startling beauty of a London dawn, when the streets are fresh and quiet, and the buildings look clean, was upon them. Richard smiled and accepted gratefully.

A few minutes later the black car drew up outside the block of flats in Sloane Street where Richard lived. He turned to say thank you to Stott and saw that the man's eyes were closing; his head nodding forward.

"Thanks for the lift. . . . You should get some sleep, Inspector."

"I expect I shall one day, Doctor."

"Why not go home now? If you push yourself much harder, it'll end in tears."

Stott was a very big man. He

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chuckled. "I shall just have to use my handkerchief, Doctor. I live in Edgware. Haven't got the time. I'll have a doss in my office, but I must be back on the job by nine — and that's that. . . . Don't ever be a copper."

A real concern for the amiable policeman rose in Richard. He frowned. "Do me a favor," he said. "Come upstairs and have a sleep in my spare room. There's a bed ready. I'll promise to have you up by half-past eight."

Stott grinned and his weather-beaten face was enlivened. "Lumme," he said. "What a lovely thought." He turned to the driver. "Ask 'em to send a car here for me at 8:45, Ripley. And if I'm wanted the telephone number's . . ."

"Sloane 3847."

They went up in the elevator. Ten minutes later, six foot three of pleasant policeman in airtex underclothing occupied Richard's spare bed. Stott was very fast asleep, with a dose of phenobarbital inside him, and on his face the expression of a man who has just been given a key to the pearly gates.

At breakfast-time the Inspector was refreshed and cheerful. "You answered a lot of silly questions with patience and intelligence last night, Doctor," he said. "Do you want to ask any?"

Richard was only too willing. Sandeman's strong dead face had haunted him for hours. "Are these murders being done by political assassins or a nut?" he demanded.

Stott took his coffee cup — a vast one, brimful of hot and wonderfully smelly coffee. "We think it's a nut," he said. "We've been through the political possibilities thirty times and found no links."

"There's always a card with the body, isn't there?"

"Every time."

Richard was silent for a moment. Then he thought aloud: "The wording of the card last night makes me pretty sure that the killer is mad. He might just as well have written 'schizophrenia' across the bottom in capital letters. . . . Bacon?"

"Thanks. . . . That's what our people think. You spotted it very quickly." Richard waved fried bread at his guest. "No, thanks," Stott said. "Frightened of getting fat. . . . Not that I'm likely to for a while. These killings are taking a pound a day off me — maybe more. Never be a copper."

"You said that last night, Inspector," Richard told him with a grin. "Don't worry, I shan't. . . . Would you like to know what the murderer will be like when you catch him?"

"Don't tell me you've got a photograph?"

"I've got a mental one — almost. . . . He'll be under thirty years old, probably. He'll be plausible and intelligent to talk to. The story he'll tell you will be one of persecution by shadowy, implacable figures, and it'll have you looking over your shoulder. It'll be detailed and factual — except that the facts will be unprovable. He

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may be confidential, at ease, and not in the least guilty-looking. In the end, though, if he runs true to type, he'll suddenly become distant. You'll have the feeling that you're talking to an automaton — something quite cold, quite soulless, and completely inhuman. When they're like that they curdle my blood — even now, and I've seen a lot of them." Richard's eyes were focused on infinity. There was compassion and worry in them.

"Watch him when he becomes cold, Inspector," Richard continued. "It means that he will be identifying you with his enemies. He'll do his best to kill you if the notion strikes him that you're one of them, and it almost always does. . . ."

Inspector Stott looked at his host with respect. "Thanks," he said. "You seem to know your job. . . . What do you think of this *Let Freedom Ring* business? The words appear on all the cards. The rest vary, but it's always *Let Freedom Ring* to start with."

Richard shrugged. "*Let Freedom Ring* — it probably means 'Heigho for the joy bells!' or 'Whoopee, I've done it again!' or something. He wants to tell the world that he's rid it of another menace, another shadow. The terrible thing is that he'll go on creating his own shadows. Such a mind has an inexhaustible fund of them. Are you going to catch the poor devil?"

Stott helped himself to marmalade. "Ask me another," he said ruefully. "We solve murders by spotting the lad who had the motive and pinning him down with fingerprints and witnesses and all the other paraphernalia. No motive here. Could be you, Doctor — or me — or Joe Soap. Nobody's ever seen him, except his victims, and they're never fit enough to talk. He's a blinking expert all right. He follows them; then in a darkish place he jumps on them from behind. . . . One hand over the mouth and the knife down behind the collar bone: hold 'em tight for thirty seconds and they're out."

"He has a genius for picking the public men I like," Richard said with a sudden anger. "Men the country still needs, blast him! If he'd stick one or two losers now and again, it wouldn't be so bad. . . . Thank God, few schizoids go that way. Most of them turn into catatonics, but they're all potentially capable of murder, and if they're far gone there's almost nothing we can do about them."

"No treatment?"

"Shocks and the lobotomies — which don't work on the real humdingers."

"Too bad."

"Too bad, indeed. Good luck to you. Come straight back if there's anything else I can do to help."

Inspector Stott nodded and took his bowler off the sideboard. "I shan't forget that bed, Doctor. Just about saved my life, it did. If one of the lads runs you in for parking, just tell him you're a friend of Charlie Stott's and see if it cuts any ice."

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"I will. The bed's there any time, if you're pushed."

When Stott had gone, Richard read the Sunday papers. Then, making no bones about it, he took off his trousers and climbed onto his bed under the eiderdown. He slept until six in the evening, and after that went out to a club to have four or five whiskies. Finding Sandeman had not been a pleasant experience: such a waste — like seeing something valuable smashed by a clumsy housemaid.

A week later the murderer struck again. He killed an Anglican bishop — an upright and godly old man who probably forgave his assailant in the same instant that he felt the agony of the knife. The papers howled for vengeance.

Richard read the reports and felt sorry for Inspector Stott. It was his case. He was too senior an officer for there to be any question of shared responsibility. "The police are incompetent!" some buffoon in the House of Commons bellowed. "The country demands action. Will the Home Secretary assure the House . . ." and so on. Richard found himself guiltily hoping, if there had to be another one to die, that it would be this particular member of Britain's governing body. He wrote a little note to Stott, wishing him good luck and apologizing for the stupidity of his fellow citizens. Then, because he was a hard-working doctor, he let the case slip from his mind.

Five days after the death of the bishop, when the hullabaloo had died down a little and comment in the Press was confined to a daily simmering of discontent, it happened that Richard was reading a surgeon's report in his office. The report concerned a tumor which had recently been taken out of the brain of a patient named Baker. The surgeon was happy to report that a section of Mr. Baker's tumor had shown under the microscope that it was not malignant.

"What's Mr. Baker's home telephone number, Elizabeth?" Richard asked his receptionist.

"Liberty 7534, Doctor."

Richard reached across his desk for the telephone, but as he did so a thought emerged from the recesses of his mind, and he paused with his hand on the receiver. He sat motionless for thirty seconds, staring at the dial on the instrument. Then, with a suddenly decisive gesture — the gesture of a man who has made up his mind against the promptings of logic — he dialed a number.

The number was not Liberty 7534, but Whitehall 1212.

"I want to speak to Chief Detective Inspector Stott, please," he said when his call was answered. There was a suppressed excitement in his voice. His free hand beat a tattoo on the top of his desk. "What? . . . Yes, I know he must be busy, but it can't be helped. This is very important. Tell him it's Doctor Richard Buchanan, the man who found Sir Basil Sandeman's body."

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Inspector Stott came on the line a minute later. "Hallo, Doctor?"

"I have a barmy idea, Inspector. Are you in the market for barmy ideas today?"

"If it's about the murders, we're buying anything."

"Can I see you?"

"Yes. When?"

"Now."

"Right you are. Come on round."

It was a house in Sidney Street, Chelsea. Richard and Stott descended from a taxi and mounted the steps. A police car cruised by innocently and Stott nodded to Richard, who pressed the bell marked Vivian — one of four, because the house was divided into flats. They heard the buzz inside the flat somewhere and, soon afterwards, footsteps. Richard licked his lips. They were dry.

The door opened. A young woman wearing an apron looked at them with innocent inquiry. Embarrassment clutched at Richard's throat and he knew surely that he was making a fool of himself.

"Good morning?" The girl's voice was puzzled, but not perturbed.

"Good morning, Madame. My . . . My name is Buchanan — Doctor Richard Buchanan — and this is my colleague, Doctor Stott. We are doing research on behalf of the Ministry of Health. I wondered if you would mind my asking a few simple questions. . . ."

She was a tall woman with a square, intelligent face — not beautiful, yet by no means ugly. Her hair was cut short. She looked competent, forthright, and sensible.

"I suppose it's my duty to say yes," she said. "I hope you won't mind my saying that I hate bureaucracy."

Richard smiled. Embarrassment left him. The actor in him was fascinated by the playing of a part. "I don't mind at all," he said pleasantly. "We find that we get the most valuable answers from people who are not afraid of being forthright. It will not take long."

"Well, please come in."

They went into a pleasantly furnished sitting room. The girl led the way. Richard glanced at Stott who made an encouraging face. "Don't worry," the policeman's expression said. "Just because everything looks so normal, that doesn't mean it is."

Out came a sheaf of official-looking papers from Richard's brief case. He took the cap off his fountain pen.

"Is it Mrs. or Miss Vivian?"

"Mrs."

"Do you have any children?"

"None."

"So you live in this flat alone with your husband?"

She hesitated for a moment. Richard's heart leaped. There was something wrong with the husband. He thought he knew what.

"My husband was killed during the war," she said quickly.

The pen paused over the form and Richard glanced up at her. "I'm sorry," he said.

"So am I."

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Tenseness crept into the atmosphere. Only Stott seemed unaffected by it. "So you live quite alone, Mrs. Vivian?"

"Quite alone," she answered with a breath of defiance in her voice. "No lover — no relatives — no entanglements."

Richard took a deep breath. "The . . . the . . . er . . . purpose of this inquiry is to examine the emergency arrangements incorporated in the Health Scheme. Supposing you were to be taken ill during the night, what exactly would you do?"

She smiled at him, making him feel childish. "Telephone my doctor."

"Who is?"

"Dr. Bottomley."

"How far away does Dr. Bottomley live, Mrs. Vivian?"

"At the top of the street — say, two hundred yards."

"I see."

And so it went on. For ten minutes Richard manufactured questions. Stott intervened occasionally, as calm as a lanky Buddha and very reassuring. Richard's mind turned and twisted. Logically, he knew that his inspiration now had not a leg to stand on. Intuitively, he was impelled to carry on with the interview, hoping against hope that something would emerge which would lead them to the thing they sought. The girl had to have a brother or a cousin or a friend. Perhaps she was lying about having no lover? It would be awkwardly difficult to find out.

Eventually he had to stop his questions. He could think of no way of prolonging them. He stood up, and Stott stubbed out his cigarette end and reached for his hat. Mrs. Vivian also stood up.

"Well, thank you, Mrs. Vivian. You have been very helpful."

She smiled and inclined her head. Richard fastened his brief case and glanced apologetically at Stott. The policeman was imperturbable as usual. Behind the weatherbeaten face there was a shrewd and active brain. Richard wished desperately that he knew what was going on in that brain. He found out — suddenly, and in a fashion which caused him to widen his eyes at the extraordinary self-confidence of the massive policeman.

"We let Freedom ring, Mrs. Vivian," Stott said calmly. "There was no answer, so we came round to find out what was up. All this Ministry of Health stuff was a front."

The girl stared at them, her hands frozen in an attitude almost of supplication. She licked her lips. "I don't understand."

"You asked for help, didn't you?"

She retreated, gazing at them fiercely. Richard tried to analyze her expression. If it was alarm, that would be natural. Two men pretending to be investigators, asking meaningless questions and confessing their fraud, were enough to alarm any householder. All the same, he thought he detected more than alarm in her face. She seemed to be weighing something in her mind. The tension in the room was unbearable. Richard wanted her to

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act. He wanted her to become indignant — to threaten to call the police — to show them the door — anything. But she was utterly still — except for her eyes. They moved from Stott's face to Richard's, then back again to Stott's. Suddenly Richard knew that she was protecting someone. His heart pounded.

"What do you know of the Lords of Power?" Her voice was harsh and the question as sudden as a rapier thrust.

"Nothing, except that they exist." Stott spoke calmly, revealing nothing of the triumph inside of him.

"They are evil," she said abruptly. "They are masters. They have more power than you or I could ever aspire to. That is why we shall have to attack them physically. Now that we are three, it will be easier. It was clever of you to let Freedom ring."

Crazily, Richard felt the impulse to deprecate. He wanted to blush and tell her to think nothing of it. He kept silent. Stott was in charge.

He would have done better to talk. Stott made his first mistake. "We want you to come with us, Mrs. Vivian," he said. "We have a safer place to hide than here."

The girl stared at him. "Fool!" The word was loaded with contempt. "Safer! I know how to protect myself. You know nothing. If they knew that you had joined me they would send you mad in a week. They would make you dream unspeakable things. You must stay here where I can protect you. We must all sleep within a pentagon, guarded by words of power, by cleanliness, and by ritual. . . ."

Then it came. Her face had been fiercely excited. She had been welcoming them — as underlings, perhaps, but as welcome underlings. Suddenly she became distant. Her eyes opened wide; and a psychic cold entered the room. She retreated — by one step physically, but by thousands of miles mentally. "I see," she said and the sibilance of the word made it sound like a snake's hiss. "They want me to leave my refuge. They sent you to fetch me. You shall not. *YOU SHALL NOT!*"

Richard stepped forward. "No, Mrs. Vivian. We do not come from the Lords of Power. We are friends. We want to help you."

"Liar! *Liar! Liar!*"

Her hand was in a drawer in the chest beside her. It emerged, and Richard recognized the knife. It was identical with the one he had seen protruding from Sir Basil Sandeman's shoulder. It was a kitchen knife of the most ordinary kind, but its edge had been ground and sharpened. She held it with a terrible, familiar confidence. Then she came across the room towards them. She was stealthy but very quick.

Stott picked up a chair. He held it easily, regardless of its weight, with the legs pointing away from him. He walked towards the madwoman. She lowered the knife until it was at stomach level. Stott still walked forward. She retreated. Her left hand closed about a statuette. She flung it

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with a round arm movement at Stott's head. He raised the chair to ward it off and, lithely, she lunged forward, the knife darting towards his stomach. Down came the chair. The legs caught her shoulders. Stott heaved forward and his weight carried her. She staggered back until she was pinned against the wall.

Richard leaped forward. He had wound his handkerchief round his hand, but the knife cut through the handkerchief and he felt the sheer agony of cutting — the terrible, nerve-shrieking smoothness of the razor-edge slicing across the back of his hand. His other hand clamped down on her wrist and he banged her knuckles against the wall. She seemed to feel no pain. The strength in her arm was frenzied. He clung on desperately and banged — bang, bang, bang! He could not let go, must not let go! Regardless of the ache in his wounded hand and the blood which was soaking his handkerchief, he dared not let go.

Stott moved. He dropped the chair. His great left arm swung above it and encircled her throat. The other hand reached the back of her head and pushed it forward. Breath was cut off from her lungs. "Hang on," Stott said. "Just hang on!"

She was struggling now with ten times the frenzy she had shown before. Richard's muscles ached, and the tenseness of his hand made the blood gush from the wound in a steady stream which stained the clean front of her apron and ran up his arm to soak his shirt beneath his coat sleeve. Wordlessly he struggled. The girl's eyes were eloquent and he tried to avert his own. He could not, so he saw a hatred which shocked him profoundly. It was the terrible, lonely hatred of the mad, who see every man's hand against them. Pity surged through Richard. It was a more poignant emotion than a layman would have felt because it contained the knowledge that she was utterly doomed. If she lived, it would be in a hell of her own making. Even if she died, it seemed possible that she would take her hell with her, encompassed as it was by the steel walls of her diseased personality. Richard felt pity and with it, horror. The eyes that stared into his were merciless. They desired his death. The knife wavered in mid-air. The girl's other hand was scratching at Stott's face, carving blood-stained grooves in the flesh. Stott closed his eyes and endured it.

After half a minute she weakened. Stott tightened his hold inexorably. She lurched. Richard felt the strength ebbing from her knife arm. Her knees crumpled. The terrible eyes, made more terrible by the way asphyxiation caused them to bulge in their sockets, became blank. She was unconscious.

Stott released his hold and laid her gently on the floor. Then he took a rug and rolled her in it — tightly, so that her arms were pinned to her sides. He walked across the room to the telephone. . . .

Sir Edward Bankside, Commissioner of Metropolitan Police, smiled

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with the greatest amiability at his two visitors. Inspector Stott's large, rubbery face was half-concealed behind strips of sticking plaster, but he was wearing a red carnation in the buttonhole of his best blue-serge suit. Doctor Richard Buchanan had a very professionally bandaged right hand which did not appear to worry him greatly. With a doctor's contempt for something that he knew how to cure, he had already nearly forgotten the six-inch cut which the pitiful Mrs. Vivian had carved across the back of his hand.

"Tell me how," the Commissioner said contentedly.

Stott turned to Richard and waved his hand generously. "Doctor Buchanan's story, sir. He did the thinking."

"Well, Doctor?"

Richard smiled. "Thinking is hardly the word," he said. "I had a hunch. Vanity is common in a lunatic. In their moments of triumph, schizophrenics think they can conquer the world. The words *Let Freedom Ring* stuck in my mind. Then one day my receptionist told me the telephone number of a patient — it was Liberty 7534. . . ."

Sir Edward smiled wryly. "I am quite aware that it qualifies me for the bottom of the class, but I still don't understand."

Richard pushed the telephone instrument on the desk towards the Commissioner. "Dial *FRE*, Sir Edward," he said.

Inspector Stott glanced at his superior, who was also a friend, and shook with huge amusement. The Commissioner said, "Goodness gracious me!"

"*FRE*," Richard went on. "The first three letters of *Freedom* — or of the telephone exchange, *Fremantle*. Now, the last four letters of *freedom* are *EDOM* — and *E* is also 3 on a London telephone dial. So is *D*. *O* is also nought or zero, and *M* is also 7. So when you *let Freedom ring*, you ring *Fremantle 3307*."

Sir Edward chuckled. "Blessed are the simplicities," he said, "for they are difficult to spot. Who'd have thought it? And it was only vanity which made her insert that very risky clause in each of her messages?"

Richard made a doubtful gesture with his bandaged hand. "Partly vanity," he said. "But Stott and I decided that she also wished to attract recruits. She worked this out as a sort of test, probably. If somebody thought the way she did and solved her puzzle, he would be worthy of joining her. Don't look for what we think of as logic in the mind of a madwoman."

The Commissioner shook his head. Then, with a strange fascination, he dialed *Freedom*. There was a pause and the ringing tone sounded in the receiver. "'Ullo," said a voice. "Freemantle double three — O — seven."

"Commissioner of Police here. Who is that speaking?"

A deep inhalation of awe-inspired breath could be heard over the wire. "Constable 'Iggins speaking, sir — from the Vivian place in Sidney

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Street, sir. Anything I can do for you, sir?"

"Nothing, thank you, Higgins," Sir Edward said mildly. "I was just amusing myself."

"Yes, sir," said Constable Higgins. "I fully unnerstand, sir." He was lying. He did not understand. The pastimes of the Commissioner of Police and the subtleties of a demented mind were closed books to Constable Higgins. Probably he was fortunate. There were two men in London who had watched the mind of Mrs. Vivian in action and almost certainly they would never forget it. . . .

EDITORS' NOTE: *Do you, by any chance, think that the telephone device in Kem Bennett's story is fantastic, or even farfetched? Nothing could be farther from the truth: the device is not only perfectly possible and credible, but it has actually happened in real life!*

Richard Himber, the well-known orchestra leader and magician, used the device while he lived in New York City. When friends or acquaintances asked Dick for his telephone number, he would always answer: "Why, just call me." But what is your number, they would repeat. And Dick would say: "Just call ME — dial R-H-I-M-B-E-R."

Now, if you did precisely what Dick suggested, you would dial RH 4-6237. As any dial phone will confirm, I is also 4, M is also 6, B is also 2, and so on. And, of course, Dick's actual number was RHinelander 4-6237. (Don't try that number now — Dick has moved to the suburbs, where he no longer can use the device, since most suburbs of New York City still have the regular, not the dial, phone.)

The trick is a cutie — no question about it. It is so attractive, and such excellent grist for the mill of conversation — to say nothing of being so downright convenient and helpful to the memory — that we seriously considered asking the telephone company to give us a number which would permit us to say, "Why, just call E-L-Q-U-E-E-N." But darn it, it wouldn't work for us! The alphabet has 26 letters, but the dial phone shows only 25. And which letter of the alphabet is the one — the only one! — not used by the telephone company in its dialing system? The one letter that completely stymies us — Q!

Wonder why there is no Q on the dial of a telephone? Whatever the reason, there's a plot gimmick in the absence of Q — and we fully intend building a story around it!

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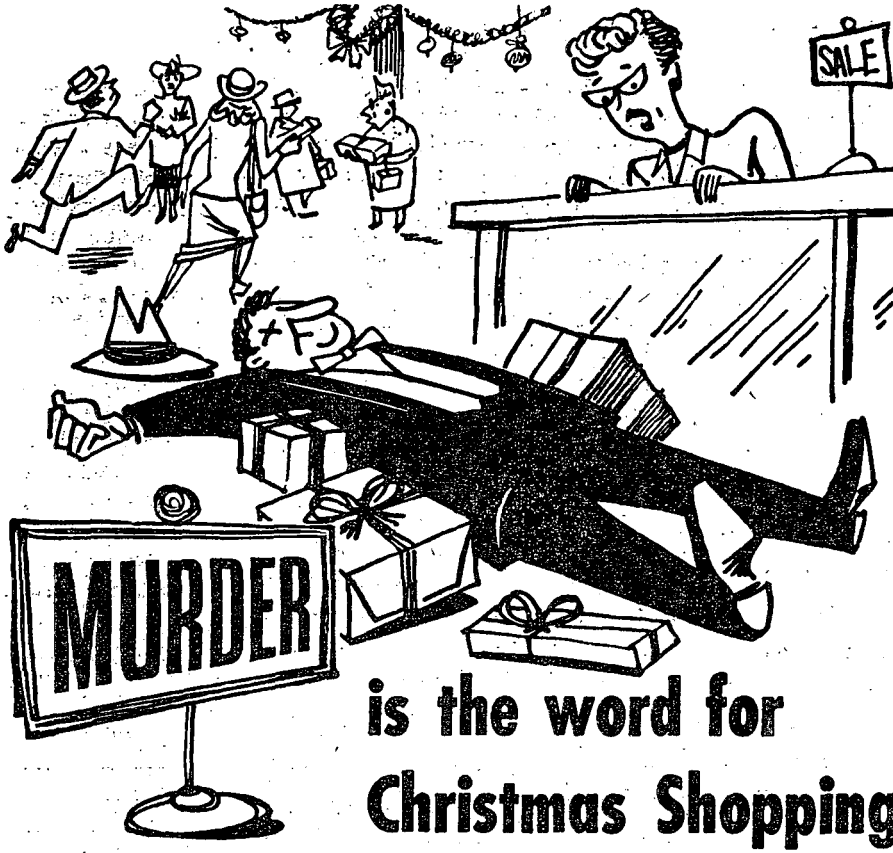

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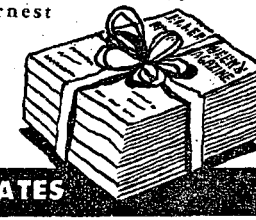

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The Case of The ONE-EYED WITNESS

WHEN Mason picked up the phone a female voice said: "See Carlin tonight. Tell him to get another partner. *It's a matter of life and death!"*

But Carlin had NEVER HAD a partner! Yet 30 minutes later Carlin was MURDERED! And then Perry rushes over to the apartment and finds — *another corpse!*

③ *Peter Cheyney's*

LADIES WON'T WAIT

YOU and another Intelligence Mi looking for your buddy Rockie. Su a car KILLS your fellow-operative. IE'S CAR! That means HE'S DEAD,

A woman whispers, *"Ladies won't* — the code word to contact other tives. You find her . . . MURDERED in the next room, THE KILLER IS ING FOR *YOU!*

④ *Clarence Budington Kelland's*

THE GREAT MAIL ROBBERY

THREE dresses disappear in the mails. When Inspector Scarlet goes poking through the mail bags, he finds — A CORPSE! Then a "debutante" is seen in one of the dresses — escorted by a fake "diplomat." Later one of the dress labels is found in a truck. But the driver can't explain it—he is the SECOND CORPSE!

⑤ *Mary Roberts Rinehart's*

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MRS. Shepard can't believe her son killed his wife. She hides the murder weapon—*her son's hunting knife.* But it *disappears!* Then the killer strikes down TWO MORE victims. At last Mrs. Shepard finds the knife—in VICTIM No. FOUR.

This is only the first of *two* Rinehart thrillers in this volume.

⑥ *Mignon G. Eberhart's*

HUNT WITH THE HOUND

MURDER STRIKES at the fox hunt the finger of guilt points at Sue Only ONE person can clear her. Bu person is found DEAD! Then it daw Sue that SHE is to be the next victi One night, she KNOWS the kil near. She hears him moving closer, ER . . . *CLOSER* . . .

—*Continued inside cov*

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